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Mythology and Masculinity: A Study of Gender, Sexuality and Identity in the Art of the Italian Renaissance.

Volume One of two volumes

(Text)

by

Ann Haughton

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the History of Art
at the University of Warwick.

University of Warwick, Department of the History of Art
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CHAPTER TWO: The 'Agony and the Ecstasy' of Michelangelo's Mythological Drawings for Tommaso de' Cavalieri.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. I also declare that it has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.

Abstract

The concerns of this thesis are aligned with approaches to the historical study of sexuality, gender and identity in art, society and culture which are increasingly articulate and questioning at present. However, it is distinct from these recent studies because it redirects attention toward a stimulating encounter with the past through new theoretical proposals and interpretive perspectives on the manner in which mythology asserts itself as the vehicle for expressing male same-sex erotic behaviour, gender performance and masculine identity in the visual culture of the Italian Renaissance. By following a methodological, historiographical and interdisciplinary mode of enquiry, this thesis formulates and expresses new perspectives which engage with the representation of masculine concerns relating to these historically specific matters in the visual domain of the period. Conventional historical definitions of traditional art historical models of masculinity are also called into question through reassessment of how the function of the ideal male nude body in Renaissance art was shaped by particular social and historical contexts in different regions of Italy during the sixteenth century. These interrelated themes are approached in three stages.

Firstly, there is interpretation of the complex and convoluted meanings within the narrative of the mythic sources, as well as decoding and contextualising of the symbolic messages of the images in question. Secondly, I assemble and examine the textual evidence that exists about erotic and social relationships between males in the Renaissance so that their historical significance can be tracked and placed in the context of the tension which existed between Renaissance Italian judicial and religious proscription and commonplace behaviour. And thirdly, I offer comprehensive analyses and interpretive frameworks which are informed by and based upon a wide range of written as well as visual sources together with evaluation of competing theoretical perceptions. The main arguments are presented in three chapters:

The central theme of Chapter One is gender performance with specific focus upon the integral and didactic role of pederasty in visual representations of myths which conflate erotic desire between males and philosophical allegory. The historical phenomenon of pederastic relationships between males is addressed through interrogation of the pictorial vocabulary of Benvenuto Cellini's marble *Apollo and Hyacinth* (1545), and Giulio Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* (1524).The arguments and theories discussed and analysed in Chapter Two deal with Michelangelo's depiction of Ovidian mythic narratives. Here, close attention is paid to the intricate nuances and sophisticated iconography used by Michelangelo for three highly finished presentation drawings - *The Rape of Ganymede* (1532), *The Punishment of Tityus* (1532) and *The Fall of Phaeton* (1533) - which Michelangelo presented to Tommaso De' Cavalieri. The chapter aims to encourage a re-evaluation of these three drawings as a meaningful and connected narrative endowed with significant cultural and personal significance relating to their creator's anguish about physical desire and its relationship to what modernity terms as 'sexuality'. In Chapter Three, I consider how several works featuring the theme of Apollo flaying Marsyas can be read as articulations of the imaginative and ideological structures of the formation and preservation of masculine identities. The chapter addresses the iconographic visibility of the theme of flaying and explores the philosophical and literary metaphoric significance of this myth. Primacy is given to destabilising dominant conceptualizations of the heroic male nude as a subject in art throughout all these selected case studies. Centred as they are on sexual attraction or destruction rather than idealisation of the male figure, these chapters offer a revaluation of ways of seeing the archetypal heroic nude in a myriad of ways.

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INTRODUCTION

This research thesis finds itself in close alignment with approaches to the historical study of gender, sexuality and identity in art, society and culture which have become increasingly articulate and questioning in the last few decades. However, it is distinct from these recent studies because it redirects attention toward a stimulating encounter with the past through psychological and biographical proposals together with new interpretive perspectives on the manner in which mythology asserts itself as the vehicle for expressing male same-sex erotic behaviour, gender performance and masculine identity in the visual culture of the Italian Renaissance.[1] The general neglect by art historians of homoerotic art in this period will be addressed using a range of written and visual sources to analyse mythic texts and symbolic images together with consideration of competing theoretical perceptions. Moreover, conventional historical definitions of traditional art historical models of masculinity are called into question through reassessment of how the function of the ideal male nude body in Renaissance art was shaped by the particular social and historical contexts of Florence in the 1540s, Rome in the 1530s and 1540s, and Venice in the 1570s.

The rediscovery of the culture of classical antiquity in the early fifteenth century restored the nude to the heart of creative endeavour but, as in ancient Greece, there was a primacy among Renaissance artists for portraying an idealized, beautiful human form with connotations of heroism and virtue. Generally, the male nude in art was typically celebrating an ideal - an epitome of health, youth, and geometric proportion - rather than the physicality or sensuality of a naked individual. This pre-eminence of the heroic male nude has meant that

[1] W. Kerrigan and G. Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance*, Baltimore and London, 1989. For a definition of the Italian Renaissance in chronological terms see J. Brotton, *The Renaissance*, Oxford, 2006, pp. 8 -11.

academic art history has tended to ignore the sexuality of the male nude, speaking instead of line, form and composition as its primary objective. However, as interest in mythological subjects increased, artists found new approaches to representing the idealised male nude figure. This thesis will seek to rupture traditional concepts of the ideal nude in art. In Chapters One and Two this will be done by exploring its sometimes uneasy relationship to sexual desire. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. By 'queering' traditional idealization of masculine athletic beauty, these chapters offer a new mode of seeing the sensual yet virile male nude from the relatively decentred perspective of delectation and attraction. The analytical purchase provided by a queer reading of these chapters' case studies will aim to demonstrate that by bringing gender and sexual attraction back into the evaluation we can shed greater light on how, although they reflect many of the values and proportions of ancient statuary, such figures also highlight the seductive appeal of the eroticised male nude body rather than its ideal geometry. Chapter Three considers another critical perspective opened up by a queer approach with analysis of the representation of the flayed ideal male body in religion, anatomy, and mythology. The term 'queer' is used here to imply that, as a rubric that enacts continuities with, but differs from 'normative' representations of the idealised male nude figure, these images of the flayed and violated nude body portray the literal and allegorical rupture of standard ideas of normality associated with the male nude form.

Primacy is given to destabilising dominant conceptualizations of the heroic male nude as a subject in art throughout all these selected case studies. Centred as they are on sexual attraction or destruction rather than idealisation of the male figure, these chapters offer a revaluation of ways of seeing the archetypal heroic nude in a myriad of ways.

My use of this term 'Italian Renaissance' applies here to both a period of history and a cultural transformation or renewal that occurred in politics, art, philosophy, science and society which is generally understood to have occurred in Italy between the years 1400 and 1600.[2] My study examines the ways in which the artistic depiction of some mythological narratives was enmeshed with the period's attitudes toward sexual and social relationships between men as well as prevalent ideological complexities of gender, sexuality and identity. The primary case studies under investigation for the concerns of gender performativity in the context of intergenerational male same-sex behaviour are Benvenuto Cellini's marble *Apollo and Hyacinth* (1545), and Giulio Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* (1524). Renaissance notions of 'sexuality' are explored by focusing on Michelangelo Buonarroti's possible sexual apprehensions through analysis of three of his highly finished presentation drawings - *The Rape of Ganymede* (1532), *The Punishment of Tityus* (1532) and *The Fall of Phaeton* (1533). Lastly, the question of Renaissance notions of identity and self-knowledge will be reviewed through a broad selection of artworks depicting the *Apollo and Marsyas* theme.

Mythology is given primacy here because during the Renaissance a profound transformation occurred in Italian culture, fuelled in large part by the rediscovery of the pagan mythological imagination of classical antiquity.[3] At this time, artists and their patrons appropriated classical texts less as historical documents than as works that could be adapted or distorted to voice their own interests, perspectives and anxieties. A revival

[2] There are various positive and negative connotations associated with the term 'Renaissance' and recent scholarship has often seemed compelled to postulate newer interpretations of how the Renaissance should be periodized. Rather than try to define the limits of these categories too closely, it has been my decision to offer no radical departure from the traditional view encompassing the time frame from 1400 to 1600.

[3] For the re-emergence of pagan gods in Renaissance art see M. Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, London, 2005, pp.7-36; E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London, 1967; J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, Princeton, 1972 and L. Barkan. *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis & the Pursuit of Paganism*, New Haven and London, 1986 (with bibliography).

of interest in a sensuous and sensual world where pagan deities indulged in cruelty, mischief and promiscuity brought an ennobling reference to classical antiquity. However, the historical licence attributed to the sexual activities of pagan protagonists existed, sometimes uneasily, alongside the official symbols and doctrines of the Church. The Renaissance itself was a period which was notably concerned with the relationship between the written and the visual, therefore mythological narratives, and their visual rendition, became common analogies to express the virtues of elegiac, sexual desire and endless tragic love.[4] More particularly, the rediscovered works of Homer, Ovid, Virgil, Lucian and other poets, philosophers and historians, provided an antique idealised and sanctioned precedent for deviant or erotic behaviour imbued with intellectual, social and political rationale but yet devoid of the moral and religious condemnation that characterised most behavioural discourse in the Christian era. However untrue these stories were to the realities of daily life, when handily couched under the rubric of paganism, myths seduced the Italian imagination and permeated many aspects of Renaissance society and culture, making the presence of pagan gods and goddesses, with all their sexual predilections, a powerful force in Western culture. As habits of thought which bridged the gap between the culture of the past and that of the Renaissance present, mythology imparted a paradigmatic narrative currency that was transmitted across time by depicting how sex was supremely important to the gods. Moreover, the Renaissance imagination became endowed with a pantheon of divinities

[4] The most influential text for dissemination of mythography in the Renaissance was Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (*On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles*), 1360 revised up to 1374. Other versions to appear in the 16th century were Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia in qua simul de eorum imaginibus et cognominibus agitur* (*On the History of Pagan Gods in Which Their Images and Cognates Are Dealt with*), Basel, 1548; Natale Conti, *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* (*On Mythology or on the Explanation of Fables*), Venice, 1551; Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini colla sposizione degli dei degli antichi* (*The Images with Explanations of the Gods of the Ancients*), Venice, 1556.

and heroes, a catalogue of licentious images, and a set of erotic references by which deviance and desire could be encoded into contemporary experiences. Consequently, art which captured this special resonance between a mythical account and visual object enjoyed wildfire popularity. As John Boswell remarks, Renaissance audiences clearly recognised continuity between their experiences of love and those expressed by the poets of classical Greece and Rome: 'The literature of falling in love in all Western societies… is so similar that… poets are struck that it's the same phenomenon and they constantly repeat the love literature of previous ages and apply it to their own experience'.[5]

The ways in which male same-sex desire, gender performance and identities are visually asserted via an evident link to mythology underpins the pivotal premise of this thesis, but also central to this study is the visibility and identification of other historical and cultural elements at play within the selected case studies. Furthermore, there is elucidation of the manner in which such images and their attendant narratives of male same sex erotic behaviour and masculine identity were engendered in such a way by Renaissance artists so that they reflected, expressed, embodied and helped shape or challenge the social and sexual attitudes of their own time and place.

Art was a fundamental part of the history of the Italian Renaissance, and visual images were not only creations of the individuals who designed and executed them but also of the society which produced these creators. It can also be argued that the process of identifying with the past has the capacity to draw attention to its symbolic role as a resource for the formation of perceived non-normative identities in the present.[6]

[5] J. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe*, New York, 1995, pp. 23-4.
[6] With respect to homoerotic visual imagery, E. Cooper's book *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*, London and New York, 1994, touches upon homoerotic visual culture produced in the Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the first chapter. However the remainder

However, until recently, art and literature produced in the Renaissance has received little attention outside of the syntax of 'normative' heterosexuality or feminism when addressing the performance of gender, sexuality and identity.[7] One of the major tenets of my research is the importance of recognising that the visual representation of these topics needs to be examined from many perspectives in order to be fully understood. Nevertheless, Renaissance Italy, as well as Greco-Roman antiquity, is at an immense distance in time and culture from our own, thus we could do well to be cautious about projecting our ways of seeing onto the artists or the ideology of the past.[8] As Michael Baxandall persuasively argues in his book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 'social history and art history are contiguous, each offering necessary insights into the other'.[9] Baxandall describes the ways in which the mind and a body of cognitions common to a society that included patrons, artists and audiences conditioned the character of works of art as the 'period eye'. Baxandall's theoretical concept of the 'period eye' provides an important paradigm for understanding the role played by contemporary visual skills, perceptual modes and cognitive styles in the cultural

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focuses predominantly on gay and lesbian art of the twentieth century with emphasis upon how homosexual artists express their own identity. J. Smalls presents a generalised overview on art with homoerotic connotations from antiquity to the present day in his *Homosexuality in Art*, New York, 2003. Likewise, James Saslow undertakes a partial survey of gay and lesbian visual expression in his *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, New York, 1999. My own research project differs from that of these authors because it is a more narrowly focused study of the nuanced field of homoerotic mythological representations produced during the Italian Renaissance.

[7] The singularly most informative and pioneering study of the theme of homoerotic art using mythological subject matter largely limited to the Ganymede topos is J. Saslow's *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, New Haven and London, 1986. The popularity of Ganymede in Italian art of the period is also the focus of L. Barkan's *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism*, Stanford, 1991. However, both these authors' research differs from my own because they chiefly restrict their work to the Ganymede trope alone. For general explanations of the early modern context of sodomy see J. Goldberg, ed., *Reclaiming Sodom*, New York and London, 1994, pp. 3-6, also *Queering the Renaissance*, Durham and London, 1994, pp. 12-15 and *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*, Stanford, 1992, by the same author. Histories of sexual activity between males are also found in D. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, New York and London, 1990.

[8] For an account of male same-sex desire in antiquity, see C. Williams. *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, 1999. Also see, B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*, London, 1987 and A. Richlin, *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, New York and Oxford, 1992.

[9] M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy; A Primer in the Social history of Pictorial Style*, Oxford, 1988, p. 5.

construction of vision and reception, stating: 'the picture is sensitive to the interpretive skills – patterns, categories, inferences, analogies – the mind brings to it.'[10] With the aim of addressing the extent to which characterisation of a set of viewing norms and responses are critical epistemological issues, this thesis adopts a similar approach to Baxandall's 'period eye' in order to engage with the historical and sexual specificity of the period.

In order to integrate social, cultural and visual analysis of the imagery selected as the case studies in each chapter, I interrogate the ways in which these works of art were socially constructed, along with how such images could have played an active role in the construction of social orders within the larger social structure. However, our position of remove from Renaissance perceptual and emotional priorities has significant impact on any approach to the historical and sexual specificity of the past. And what one brings in the way of experience and understanding to an encounter with a work of art greatly affects the way one perceives it. Therefore, the argumentation I adduce throughout is anchored upon a substantial number of possible meanings, contexts and circumstances which are highly specific to the society in which the images were created. Foremost of which is the premise that sexuality, identity and gender were not constructed in the same way in these cultures. The core propositions in this thesis are supported by the appropriation of individual frameworks for each chapter which articulate the intersecting roles between the respective case studies, their mythological narratives and the contemporary social contexts in which they were conceived, produced and interpreted. Its principal intention is to offer a more in depth reflection on

[10] Baxandall, 1988, p. 34.

the articulations between the ways in which masculinity and mythology tied together Renaissance notions of gender performance, sexuality and identity in its art.

Furthermore, it seeks to bring into focus the manner in which each of the investigated case studies speaks directly to the importance of understanding art as a reflection of wider cultural values and contingencies, and as the product of specific historical, social and political conditions.

Terminology

One of the greatest difficulties in writing the history of identity, gender and sexuality is simply the definition of what might have been generally understood as these modern terms in a given historical period. Therefore, it is necessary to set out at this juncture the context for their use in this thesis. In the cultural-historical context of the Renaissance, gender will be used here to describe a set of social and behavioural norms that were generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship.[11]

Gender is distinct from sex which is biological because gender is culturally constructed. I consider gender roles to be performative because they differ according to the external manifestation of one's gender identity through masculine, feminine, gender-variant or gender neutral behavior, clothing, hairstyles, or body characteristics. As defined by Jackson and Scott, 'Masculinity and femininity are products not of biology but of the social, cultural and psychological attributes acquired through the process of becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time'.[12] The term 'performance' is applied in this context to the manner in which gender was performed

[11] Useful discussions on the description and definition of gender are found in M. E. Weisner, *Gender in History*, Oxford, 2011. Also A. Phillips, *Gender and Culture*, London, 2013 and H. Bradley, *Gender*, Cambridge, 2013.
[12] S. Jackson and S. Scott, (eds.), *Gender: A Sociological Reader*, New York and London, 2002, p. 9.

and practised in Renaissance Italy and how males of this period conformed to, contested, or built on a range of contemporary codes of associated masculine attitudes, behaviours, and personality traits that were widely considered to be socially appropriate within that culture.

Identity, meanwhile, is what makes who or what a person is and will be contextualised in this thesis as the collective set of characteristics by which a person is definitively recognizable or known.[13] I will apply the term 'masculine gender identity' to describe how a male's sense of his masculinity and the characteristics of his gender are being or hoped to be presented.[14] The sets of qualities, characteristics or roles generally considered typical of, or appropriate to, masculine gender categories will be discussed in order to understand the manner in which they served as the basis of the formation of Renaissance social identity in relation to other members of that society.[15] The visual representation of these social norms associated with Renaissance notions of masculinity will be examined alongside the term 'cultural identity' which will be applied as the identity of an individual who is belonging to a group or society with its own indigenous cultural identifiers and conditions that might include location, gender, history, language, sexuality, and religious beliefs.[16]

In this study of Renaissance sexual predilections between males, the term 'sexuality' will be appropriated for the experience of sexual desire and sexual life or to describe those actions that are related to sex rather than the formation of a sexual

[13] For account of social identity in early modern period Florence, see J. Burke, *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*, Pennsylvania, 2004.
[14] T. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, London, 2010, pp. 17-21.
[15] Masculine gender in art is discussed in J. Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, New Haven and London, 1998. See also S. Cardarelli, (ed.), *Art and Identity: Visual Culture, Politics and Religion in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Newcastle, 2012.
[16] In the context of the relationship between mythology and identity, see A. Maggi, *In the Company of Demons: Unnatural Beings, Love and Identity in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago, 2006.

orientation or identity. The pivotal foundation for study of the social history of male same-sex behaviour in the Renaissance is Michael Rocke's pioneering scholarship in *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (1996).[17] As Rocke propounds, sexuality is not a universal feature of human life because unlike sex, which is a natural and biological fact, sexuality is a cultural product: 'Italians of the Renaissance would have found current beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality as well as much of modern sexual experience foreign indeed, and if one is to comprehend the nature and significance of homosexual behaviour in this particular historical context, the parochialism of our own notions must be recognised and these cultural differences accorded their proper due'.[18] As Halperin also proposes 'it never occurred to pre-modern cultures to ascribe a person's sexual tastes to some positive, structural, or constitutional feature of his or her personality…instead of attempting to trace the history of 'homosexuality' as if it were a thing, therefore, we might more profitably analyse how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts has been variously constructed over time by members of human living groups'.[19]

That the nature of homosexuality is culturally specific is generally agreed upon by these two social historians. Their respective theories build upon those expressed by Michel Foucault in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, where he argues that the current notion of a homosexual / heterosexual binary has developed as a means to make subjects 'speak' of their sexuality.[20] As a result of the growing discourse on the nature of the homosexual behaviours, according to Foucault, those who practice them become

[17] M. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Oxford, 1996. For a social and historical overview of male same-sex behaviours see M. Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period*, Oxford, 1979 and K. Crawford, *European Sexualities 1400-1800*, Cambridge, 2007.
[18] Rocke, 1996, p. 11.
[19] Halperin, 1990, pp. 27-29.
[20] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Vols.1-3), trans. R. Hurley, London, 1976.

defined by their sexual conduct: 'This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals. As defined by the ancient civil and canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history'.[21] Foucault's theoretical propositions are relevant to the goals of the present study which maintains that modern categories should not be applied uncritically to Renaissance images and texts since no conception of a 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' as a person or identity existed at this time. My eschewal of those particular terms which when applied to the early modern period are both anachronistic and inappropriate is one of the most pressing general issues that needs to be foregrounded here.[22] This is because the conditions in which modernity speaks of homosexuality cannot be translated into those used in the Renaissance nor antiquity because this modern idiom defines not only what one does from time to time, but also, apparently, what one is. As Foucault proclaimed, early modern male same-sex desire was 'that utterly confused category' and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the notion of homosexuality came to be seen as the basis of an individual's nature.[23] Consequently, when addressing the attitudes and practice of antiquity and the Renaissance, the modern terms 'homosexual' or 'homosexuality' as a verb or an adjective will be markedly absent from this study.[24] Instead, there is reliance upon the concepts of the homosocial and the homoerotic,

[21] Foucault, Vol.1, 1976, pp. 42-3.
[22] This term 'homosexuality' was first coined by Károly Mária Kertbeny in 1869 and enjoyed currency within a context of late nineteenth-century sexual psychopathology. For an excellent discussion of the use of various terminology for male same-sex erotics, see Halperin, 1990, pp. 60-65.
[23] Foucault, 1976, p. 43.
[24] My decision to follow this course has been taken following discussion with both Michael Rocke and James Saslow on the matter of the problematic use of such terminology. Both authors concur that neither 'homosexuality' nor 'sodomy' are correct terms in relation to male same-sex erotic behaviour in Renaissance Italy although they have each resorted to their use in their publications.

which have proven to be flexible and useful, since neither pronounces on sexual nature being limited to a description of behaviour.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the erotic as 'of or pertaining to the passion of love; concerned with or treating love', whereas in the *Collins Dictionary* it is defined as 'of concerning, or arousing sexual desire or giving sexual pleasure'.[25] In the context of this thesis, the term 'erotic' is taken to mean things or situations that are potentially stimulating or are intended to evoke sexual interest or arousal. The term 'homoeroticism' refers to sexual attraction between male members of the same sex and homoerotic as pertaining to, revealing or portraying same-sex desire. The word 'homosociality' is applied here to mean a form of male bonding which is not necessarily sexual.[26] The concept of 'homoerotic' differs from that of homosexuality as it refers specifically to the desire itself, which can be temporary, whereas 'homosexuality' implies a more permanent state of identity or sexual orientation. The above definitions are fundamental to my research and its pursuit of alternative lines of enquiry about the dialogue between these issues and works of art whose meanings have been overlooked or denied.

Visual culture has much to contribute to an understanding of the history of sexuality, masculine gender performance and identity. It is difficult to understand why these issues have been denied or suppressed but Diane Wolfthal offers the proposal that: 'it could be 'part of an outgrowth of the long-standing desire to view art as the embodiment of noble human action or as the expression of the highest and purest ideals.

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[25] The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, vol. V, Oxford, 1989, p. 374 and *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus*, Glasgow, 1998, p. 380. For a comprehensive discussion of erotic desire in art, see A. Mahon *Eroticism and Art*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 11-22.

[26] For ideas on homosocial bonds between males, see E.K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, 1985. The OED defines 'homoerotic' as 'pertaining to or characterized by a tendency for erotic emotions to be centered on a person of the same sex'. (http://0-www.oed.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/Entry/88035).

Sexual desire and activity, by contrast, were all too often deemed base or evil, and so ignored'.[27] It is also a probability that homoerotically charged images have been lost or destroyed in greater quantity than religious or other erotically themed works. However, the need to re-examine 'sexuality' as a historically specific cultural construction is pertinently summarised by Jeffrey Weeks' proposition that ''social processes construct subjectivities not just as categories but at the level of individual desires. This perception should be the starting point for future social and historical studies of 'homosexuality' and 'sexuality' in general''.[28] Ultimately, the very fact that there are challenges to the study, comprehension and description of the sexual specificity of those early modern cultures which lacked a suitable vocabulary to describe the patterns and behaviours we observe in its art is a contributing factor to why conventional limited and limiting heterosexually biased discourse on these themes requires fresh interrogation. Only then, it can be argued, will new questions surface about the responses such artworks engendered through the messages they expressed, and only then will we gain a closer understanding of how there was a reliance upon particular visual codes and embodied responses for their articulation.

Methodology

These interrelated themes are approached in three stages. Firstly, there is interpretation of the complex and convoluted meanings within the narrative of the mythic sources, as well as decoding and contextualising of the symbolic messages of the images in question. Secondly, I assemble and examine the textual evidence that exists about erotic and social relationships between males in the Renaissance so that their historical

[27] D. Wolfthal, *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe*, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 4.
[28] J. Weeks, 'Discourse, Desire and Sexual Deviance: Some Problems in a History of Homosexuality', in K. Plummer, (ed.), *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, London, 1981, pp. 111-21.

significance can be tracked and placed in the context of the tension which existed between Renaissance Italian judicial and religious proscription and commonplace behaviour. And thirdly, I offer comprehensive analyses and interpretive frameworks which are informed by and based upon a wide range of written as well as visual sources together with evaluation of competing theoretical perceptions.[29]

The main arguments are presented in three chapters. The central theme of Chapter One is gender performance with specific focus upon the integral and didactic role of pederasty in visual representations of myths which conflate erotic desire between males and philosophical allegory. The historical phenomenon of pederastic relationships between males is addressed in order to better understand its representation in art of the period through interrogation of the pictorial vocabulary of Benvenuto Cellini's marble *Apollo and Hyacinth* (1545), and Giulio Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* (1524). In order to argue that these particular works are especially well suited to illustrate the relationship of pederasty to the cultural performance of masculinity, the chapter focuses upon the ways in which masculine gender expectations were maintained or subverted in these particular homoerotically charged images. By examining and situating these artistic creations in terms of social articulation of Renaissance power differentials and constructs, I also elucidate their potential as a rich source for understanding the social, political, institutional and cultural contexts that underpinned their production and reception. I argue that when read as an expression of the existing social and sexual relations, these works can be interpreted as embodying the representative value of the gendered masculine body in Renaissance popular culture and

[29] Wherever possible there is recourse to the evidence and meanings that can be drawn out of contemporary sources as well as the existing mainstream for published documentation. However, when drawing out potential meanings which cannot be demonstrable through written sources I work systematically towards a reconstruction of the type of factors that might have brought such a work into being.

the manner in which the social norms of male-male sexuality were both visually activated and characterised.

The arguments and theories discussed and analysed in Chapter Two provide a foil for the first chapter because, in contrast to Cellini and Romano's uninhibited approach to the expression of homoeroticism in their respective tropes, they deal with the inhibited Michelangelo's depiction of mythic narratives also sourced from the same Ovidian poem *Metamorphoses.* Close attention is paid to the intricate nuances and sophisticated iconography used by Michelangelo for three highly finished presentation drawings - *The Rape of Ganymede* (1532), *The Punishment of Tityus* (1532) and *The Fall of Phaeton* (1533) - which Michelangelo presented to his adored but much younger friend and, perhaps, lover Tommaso De' Cavalieri. By turning to a closer examination of the poetry and letters exchanged between the pair, I tender new evaluations concerning the social, personal, and sexual context of these drawings. This argument is founded on the hypothesis that there is a complex web of autobiographical and psychological identifications in these presentation drawings. I argue that if they are approached as a visually readable continuum of events, the interconnection between their possible meanings can be read as the reflection of the complexity Michelangelo invested in their conception. With this in mind, the arguments presented here aim to encourage a re-evaluation of these three drawings as a meaningful and connected narrative endowed with significant cultural and personal significance relating to their creator's anguish about physical desire and its relationship to what modernity terms as a 'sexuality'. I explore the possibility that when read together, as well as tangentially with Michelangelo's poetry and letters, these drawings are the aesthetic embodiment of a sophisticated web of interconnections that follows a complicated and ever shifting narrative told through the evolving relationship of one image to another.

In Chapter Three, I consider how works featuring the theme of Apollo flaying Marsyas can be read as articulations of the imaginative and ideological structures of the formation and preservation of masculine identities in the societies that produced them. The chapter addresses the iconographic visibility of flaying in a broad selection of visual case studies which situate and elucidate the philosophical and literary metaphoric significance that the depiction of this heinous act presents. It also considers the ways in which visual imagery of the myth of *Apollo and Marsyas* elicits a complicated set of meanings which are especially germane to a broader reassessment of the flayed male body. By accounting for the historical and cultural frames that inflect its use in the Renaissance, I afford new perspectives on the currency of the flaying theme and its relation to the shifting epistemological conjunctures of male identity, scientific and self-discovery, social justice and personal redemption. I argue that a key to understanding the profound meaning of the popularity of the *Apollo and Marsyas* theme lies in the manner in which its use in Renaissance art could be seen as defining and codifying personal, political and social roles that constitute the cultural, social and psychosexual expressions of masculine identity.

CHAPTER ONE

Apollo's Amours: Till Death Do Us Part?

Introduction

The mythology on which much of ancient as well as Italian Renaissance art depends is linked to the societies which gave rise to them both. Of all these ancient texts, few translated into the realm of Renaissance social and sexual experience as closely as the trove of sexual unorthodoxies and homoerotic idioms contained in Ovid's first-century narrative poem *Metamorphoses,* which features love between divinities and mortals as its central topic.[30] The subject of metamorphosis was at home in a climate evolving out of medieval scholasticism towards its own cultural and intellectual flowering. But, more specifically Ovid's epic poem, as well the discovery of ancient homoerotically themed artifacts, revealed a pattern that informed and recorded pederasty as the highest and most intense type of male bonding. During the Renaissance, religious subject matter was undeniably limited in its range and without much scope for sexual love unless it was considered within the wider framework of divine providence. Therefore, for Renaissance males with a desire to invoke a sense of bridging the past and present in a manner that suited the needs of their period, such explicit literary and visual sources as *Metamorphoses* revealed that their counterparts in ancient Greece and Rome did not attract social disapproval for expression of sexual desire for another male, so long as the object of their desire was an adolescent whom the adult loved within the context of a codified and positively valued relationship.[31] Consequently, Ovid's mythical narratives

[30] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Books IX-XV, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge, Mass., 1977.
[31] Pederasty entailed a formal bond between an adult man and an adolescent boy which consisted of loving and often sexual relations. As an erotic and educational custom pederasty was commonplace among the upper class

provided Renaissance audiences with a familiar language with which to talk about human relationships and human experience in hitherto unknown richness and depth. As Ewin Panofsky remarked: 'no other classical author treated so great a variety of mythological subject matter or was so assiduously read, translated, paraphrased, commented upon and illustrated'.[32]

Renaissance society had sex and gender norms, but numerous individuals lived at variance with those perceived norms. Yet, same-sex desire has never mapped easily onto traditional notions concerned with the discursive field of art history. Libidinal interpretations of homoerotically charged imagery have often been problematized by the unrecognised historical and cultural specificity of sexuality and gender. As a consequence, for nearly a century, homoerotic relationships have been investigated by social scientists but homoerotically-themed art produced in the early modern period has received almost no attention from art historians, who seem to have neglected, overlooked or been circumspect about examining the topic because of the attached stigma.[33] Nonetheless, I maintain that art historians are behoved to recognise that personal sexual behaviour is shaped by and shapes the wider social and political milieu that generates visual culture. However, not all societies permit expression of all varieties of erotic disposition. Men who characteristically prefer relations with youths are considered in our culture deserving of sanction, if not outright condemnation. In many other cultures, particularly classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, pederastic relations were considered to be a transient and natural stage in the lives of both adults

as a means of teaching the young and conveying to them important cultural values such as courage, respect and restraint. See J. Saslow, *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, London, 1989 and G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford, 1985.

[32] E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*, New York, 1969, p. 140.

[33] For an account of previous scholarship, see above notes 5, 6 and 7.

and youths.[34] While pederasty does not necessarily fit into our habitual categories of understanding age-asymmetrical sexual relationships, in classical antiquity, and later in Renaissance Italy, it was often seen as an educational institution for the inculcation of moral and cultural values by the older man to the younger, as well as a form of sexual expression.[35] Such homoerotic themes were popular in Renaissance art commissioned in the court circles of northern Italy with pederasty first entering representation in the visual domain of fifteenth-century Italy when the period saw a rediscovery and renewed interest in the literature, philosophy and art of classical antiquity. In fact, there are over one hundred extant representations featuring Ganymede as the boy abducted by Zeus to become cup bearer to the gods and his own beloved.[36]

Images which appear to depict pederasty can, therefore, offer a rich contribution to art historical discourse because they bear directly on the matter of how Western society and its erotically themed art are both products of rapidly changing attitudes about sex, and how a major factor in this change can be attributed to a growing recognition of the variety possible in human sexuality. The works under discussion are Benvenuto Cellini's (1500-71) marble statue of *Apollo and Hyacinth* (Figs. 1a-c), and Giulio Romano's (1499-1546) ink drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* (Fig. 2). In this chapter I concentrate on the primary theme of these case studies as pederastic exemplars of the superordinate adult Apollo with his subordinate adolescent male beloveds.

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[34] The seminal sociological texts which this chapter will draw upon are those by Rocke (1996), and G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford, 1985. For further historical reading on societal attitudes towards sexuality, see V.L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, Chicago and London, 1976. Also see Halperin, 1990.

[35] The term derives from the combination of *pais* (Greek for boy) and *erastēs (*Greek for lover). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines pederasty as 'homosexual relations between a man and boy: homosexual anal intercourse, usually with a boy or younger man as the passive partner'. However, the *Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality* offers a more accurate definition: 'Pederasty is the erotic relationship between an adult male and a boy, generally one between the ages of twelve and seventeen, in which the older partner is attracted to the younger one who returns his affection, whether or not the liaison leads to overt sexual contact'. (http://www.williamapercy.com/wiki/index.php/Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality).

[36] The popularity of Ganymede in Italian art of the period is the focus of Barkan (1991) and Saslow (1986).

Particular attention is paid to the manner in which these images appear to embody a complex set of messages that encoded issues of gender behaviour and performance in the context of intergenerational same-sex erotic relationships during the Italian Renaissance.[37]

These interrelated themes of pederasty between an adult male Apollo and his respective juvenile lovers will be developed in two parts. Firstly, there is analysis and discussion of Cellini's marble *Apollo and Hyacinth*, thought to be executed in anticipation of its purchase by Duke Cosimo de' Medici (1519-74). The second part of this chapter presents a case study of Romano's ink drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus*, for the papal chancellor Baldassarre Turini. Primacy is given to these works of art because they embody the manner in which the variety of sexual behaviour and experience which prevailed between age-asymmetrical males in the Renaissance, as well as the psychological meanings, patterns and identities assigned to those acts, found expression in the visual domain of the period. To date, both these images have been studied but in the most cursory fashion. But, in this chapter I employ pictorial analysis, social history, as well as gender and sexuality studies to suggest new possibilities for thinking about the works in congruence with the sexual and cultural mores of the period. Analysis of *Apollo and Hyacinth*'s and *Apollo and Cyparissus*'s literary source is undertaken, together with consideration of the moral and intellectual implications each work might have held for both their creators and their intended audiences in an era when rigid social stratification was the pillar of all institutions.[38]

No text, visual or written, is comprehensible without a close consideration of contemporary interests and practices. Therefore, this chapter seeks to define and explain

[37] See D. Halperin, *Hidden from History*, (ed.), London, 1989, pp. 37-53. Also see Rocke, 1996, p. 97.
[38] See R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, 1969.

the broader conceptual and institutional conditions, together with the rigid behavioural expectations, which appear to be encoded within these two remarkable depictions of male erotics. Furthermore, with recourse to Rocke's aforementioned sociological discourse, I explore the extent to which both Cellini's sculptural group of *Apollo and Hyacinth* and Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* appear to substantiate surviving judicial records.[39] These images are evaluated in light of Rocke's proposition that 'at one time or another and with varying significance and degrees of involvement, pederastic relations formed part of the life experience of many Italian males of the late medieval and early modern period'.[40] Consideration is given to the extent to which these works conform both thematically and compositionally to the behavioural codes of masculinity, sexual and social comportment and the articulation of Renaissance power dynamics, differentials and constructs. Nuanced study and reappraisal of the allegorical and iconographic elements encapsulated in these case studies aims to achieve closer engagement with how the male body could function in Renaissance visual and political culture. Furthermore, I explore the ways in which these works could have provided structured initiatory and pedagogical models connected to rites that mark the passage from youth to adulthood at a time when lived eroticism conformed to rules of social hierarchy with sexual roles tied to age as well as class. Absolutely fundamental to my core arguments is the proposition that in these two representations Apollo's young lovers, Hyacinth and Cyparissus, do not literally transform into botanical entities as

[39] The fundamental mores and social configurations of same-sex erotic relations are discussed in Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 1996, pp. 87-101.
[40] Rocke, 1991, p. 17.

such. I instead argue that these youths who die as juveniles by Apollo's own hands, now await not literal metamorphosis into flowers or trees but accession to adulthood.[41]

Ovidian Narrative Sources

Apollo is placed prominently in *Metamorphoses* as one of the most important Olympian gods, who as the eternal beardless *kouros* had the most prominent and prolific male relationships of all the divinities. Apollo follows the archetypal antique male model of sexual behaviour in Ovid where most males desired both males and females, and acted upon both kinds of desire by having legitimate sexual relations with both women and adolescent males. Although divinities such as Apollo frequently and recklessly fell in love with other males, they never did so with other gods or with adult human males. Without exception deities only loved the most beautiful of human adolescents. The two male Apollonian romances which feature most commonly in Renaissance artistic production are those which include his adolescent beloveds Hyacinth and Cyparissus. [42] Indeed, rivalry between gods for the love of a youth is a feature of many myths represented in visual form, thereby promoting the notion of male love being divinely approved with mortal male lovers.[43] Often exalted for their royal bloodline or divine forebears, and bestowed with many similar qualities of beauty and pulchritude to their divine counterparts, these subjects shared both exoticism and otherworldliness; characteristics which invoked considerable interest from the flourishing artistic community and their patrons during the Renaissance.[44] Whereas, the inveterate

[41] B. Sergent opines a similar interpretation in his *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*, London, 1987, pp. 98-110. He also states on p. 51: 'the young men who undergo the initiation ordeal, who die a symbolic death and are born again, acquire a new being different from the one they have shed'.
[42]The love by men for adolescent males was regarded by the Greeks as a fundamental aspect of human experience. Surviving art and literature indicate that such feelings between adult higher class males were rare, and there is no evidence that pre-pubescent boys were the subject of interest. See Williams (1999), pp. 17-19.
[43] C. Downing, *Myths and Mysteries of Same-sex Love*, New York, 1990, pp. 146-59.
[44] For an informative account of the reception of mythology in the Italian Renaissance, see Bull, 2005, pp. 7-36 and Barkan, 1991, pp. 10-18.

womanizer Jupiter is reported to have taken Ganymede as his only masculine love, who as a direct result of this honor became both exemplified and sanctioned as the supreme love of the supreme god, Apollo had more male loves than any other god. In contrast to Ganymede, who was the embodiment of *the* beloved who was forever loved and desired, Apollo is often depicted as *the* paradigmatic lover. Apollo's role as the accomplished initiate, who becomes an even more accomplished initiator to his younger lovers, is a central focus of this chapter.

In Ovid's poem, Hyacinth was a beautiful mortal youth, loved equally by the god Apollo and the West Wind Zephyr. Apollo and Hyacinth took turns throwing the discus but when Hyacinth ran to catch the discus thrown by Apollo, he was struck as it fell to the ground, and died. Apollo refused to allow Hades to claim the young man; rather, he made a flower, the hyacinth, from his spilled blood. The tears of Apollo stained the newly formed flower's petals with a sign of his grief. In *Metamorphoses*, Apollo's tragic love for Hyacinthus reads thus:

> No more has he thought for zither or for bow.
> Entirely heedless of his usual pursuits, he refuses not
> to bear the nets nor hold the dogs in leash, nor go as
> comrade along the rough mountain ridges. And so
> with long association he feeds his passion's flame.
> And now Titan was about midway 'twixt the coming
> and the banished night, standing at equal distance
> from both extremes; they strip themselves and,
> gleaming with rich olive oil, they try a contest with
> the broad discus. This well poised Phoebus [Apollo]
> sent flying through the air and cleft the opposite
> clouds with the heavy iron. Down again to the solid
> earth after long time it fell, revealing the hurler's
> skill and strength combined. Straight away the
> Taenarian youth, heedless of danger and moved by
> eagerness for the game, ran out to take up the discus.
> But the hard earth, returning the flow, hurled it back
> up full in your face, O Hyacinthus.

The god grows deadly pale even as the boy, and catches up the huddled form; now he seeks to warm you again, now tries to staunch your dreadful wound, now strives to stay your parting soul with healing herbs. But his arts are of no avail; the wound is past all cure. Just as when in a watered garden, if someone breaks off violets or poppies or lilies, bristling with their yellow stamens, fainting they suddenly droop their withered heads and can no longer stand erect, but gaze, with tops bowed low, upon the earth: so the dying face lies prone, the neck, its strength all gone, cannot sustain its own weight and falls back upon the shoulders. 'Thou art fallen, defrauded of thy youth's prime,' says Phoebus, 'and in thy wound do I see my guilt; thou art my cause of grief and self-reproach; my hand must be proclaimed the cause of thy destruction. I am author of thy death. And yet, what is my fault, unless my playing with thee can be called a fault, unless my loving thee can be called a fault? And oh that I might meet death together with thee and might with thee give up my life! But since we are held from this by the laws of fate, though shalt be always with me, and shall stay mindful on my lips. Thee shall my lyre, struck by my hand, thee shall my songs proclaim. And as a new flower, by thy markings shalt thou imitate my groans. Also the time will come when a most valiant hero shall be linked with this flower, and by the same markings shall he be known.'

While Apollo thus spoke with truth-telling lips, behold, the blood which had poured out on the ground and stained the grass, ceased to be blood, and in its place there sprang a flower, brighter than the Tyrian dye. It took the form of the lily, save that it was the one which was of purple hue, while the other was silvery white. Phoebus, not satisfied with this – for 'twas he who wrought the honouring miracle – himself inscribed his grieving words upon the leaves, and the flower bore the marks, *AI AI*, letters of lamentation, drawn thereon. Sparta, too, was proud that Hyacinthus was her son, and even to this day his honour still endures; and still, as the

> anniversary returns, as did their sires, they celebrate
> the Hyacinthia in solemn festival.[45]

According to Ovid, Cyparissus was another beloved young mortal, but one to whom Apollo bequeathed a beautiful tame stag. When Cyparissus accidently killed this stag whilst being educated in the art of hunting by his lover Apollo, he was distraught by his loss. All of the god's consolations were in vain and Cyparissus was so distressed that he begged to be allowed to mourn for ever. Eventually Apollo obliged by turning him into a cypress tree which is said to be a sad tree because of the droplets of sap that form on its trunk. Ovid's narrative concerning Apollo's love for Cyparissus reads as follows:

> Still many women felt a passion for the bard; many grieved for their love repulsed. He set his example for the people of Thrace of giving his love to tender boys, and enjoying the springtime and first flower of youth.
>
> A hill there was, and on the hill a wide-extending plain, green with luxuriant grass; but the place was devoid of shade. When here the heaven-descended bard sat down and smote his sounding lyre, shade came to the place. There came the Chaonian oak, the grove of the Heliades, the oak with its deep foliage, the soft linden, the beech, the virgin laurel-tree, the brittle hazel, the ash, suitable for spear shafts, the smooth silver-fir, the ilex-tree bending with acorns, the pleasant plane, the many coloured maple, the double-hued myrtle, the viburnum with its dark blue berries. You also pliant-footed ivy, came and along with your tendrilled grapes, and the elm-trees, drapes with vines; the mountain ash, the forest-pines, the pliant palm, the prize of victory, the bare-trunked pine with broad leafy top, pleasing to the mother of the gods, since Attis, dear to Cybele,

[45] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book X, 1977, pp. 77-9.

exchanged for this his human form and stiffened in its trunk.

Amidst this throng came the cone-shaped cypress, now a tree but once a boy, beloved by that god who strings the lyre and strings the bow. For there was a mighty stag, sacred to the nymphs who haunt the Carthaean plains, whose wide spreading antlers gave ample shade to his own head. His antlers gleamed with gold, and down on his shoulders hung a gem-mounted collar set on his rounded neck. Upon his forehead a silver boss bound with small thongs was worn. Of equal size, pendent from both his ears, about his hollow temples, were gleaming pearls of bronze. He, quite devoid of fear and with none of his natural shyness, frequented men's homes and let even strangers stroke his neck. But more than to all the rest, O Cyparissus, loveliest of the Caen race, he was dear to you. It was you who led the stag to fresh pasturage and to the waters of the clear spring. Now would you weave bright garlands for his horns; now sitting like a horseman on his back, now here, now there, would gleefully guide his soft mouth with purple reigns.

It was high noon on a summer's day when the spreading claws of the shore-loving Crab were burning with the sun's hot rays. Weary, the stag had laid down upon the grassy earth and was drinking in the coolness of the forest shade. Him, all unwittingly, the boy Cyparissus, pierced with a sharp javelin, and when he saw him dying of the cruel wound, he resolved on death himself. What did not Phoebus say to comfort him! How he warned him to grieve in moderation and consistently with the occasion! The lad only groaned and begged this as the boon he most desired from heaven, that he might mourn forever. And now, as his life forces were exhausted by endless weeping, his limbs began to change to a green colour, and his locks, which but now overhung his snowy brow, were turned to a bristling crest, and he became a stiff tree with slender top looking to the starry heavens. The god groaned and, full of sadness said: 'You shall be

> mourned by me, shall mourn for others, and your place shall always be where others grieve'.
>
> Such was the grove the bard had drawn, and he sat, the central figure in an assembly of wild beasts and birds. And when he had tried the chords by touching them with his thumb, and his ears told him that the notes were in harmony although they were of different pitch, he raised his voice in this song: 'From Jove, O Muse, my mother-for all things yield to the sway of Jove- inspire my song! Oft I have sung of the power of Jove before: I have sung the giants in a heavier strain, and the victorious bolts hurled on the Phlegraean plains. But now I need the gentler touch, for I sing of boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust.[46]

Provenance and description of both case studies

Apollo and Hyacinth was Cellini's first foray into sculpture from metallurgy. Upon Cellini's death, twenty-five years after its execution, this almost completed statue was one of three works found in his workshop, along with his sculptures of *Ganymede* and *Narcissus* (Figs. 3-4). In his *Vita* the artist reveals that the marble block was assigned to him by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (1537-69) after a public altercation with his rival Baccio Bandinelli (1493-1560), but there is no extant contractual evidence to substantiate it as a firm commission.[47]

[46] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X, 1977, pp. 71-75.
[47] The Museo de Bargello displays a notice at the foot of the statue declaring it to be a commission for Duke Cosimo. In his *Vita*, Cellini declares that the Duke took particular interest in the carving of *Apollo and Hyacinth* and that he often visited his workshop whilst he was working on the statue, urging him to 'Set aside the bronze for a while and work for a bit on the marble, so that I can watch you', *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, LXXII, J. Pope- Hennessy, (ed.), London, 1949, p. 355.

Cellini's sculptural group is executed in white marble and stands 191 x 75 cm (Figs. 1a-c). The statue appears to capture the very moment after Hyacinth has been felled by the discus but yet to transform into his other being. The figure of Apollo is posed with his left leg slightly advanced with its foot on the corner of the base and his right leg erect. His right hand reaches back, caressing the hair of the kneeling and significantly smaller Hyacinth. The figure of Hyacinth is positioned slightly behind that of Apollo with his torso turned in the opposite direction but with his head pivoting backwards and upwards over the left shoulder. The boy's right and left forelegs are respectively extended behind and along the base and the left side of the work. With the exception of a diadem or Phrygian cap, Apollo is naked, as is Hyacinth. Both figures have elaborately carved curled hairstyles in the classical tradition (Fig. 5). Apollo faces away from Hyacinth as if gazing into the distance whilst Hyacinth is posed with his half open mouth displaying sensuous full and parted lips almost adjacent to Apollo's groin (Fig. 6). Apollo's left wrist rests on his thigh, and in this hand he holds a broken object, possibly part of the discus. The fingers of Hyacinth's left hand are badly damaged but Hyacinth's right hand reaches upwards with fingers touching Apollo's buttocks and his wrist clasped around an object that seems to be a branch or root of a plant (Fig. 7).

Giulio Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* was originally produced in pen and ink with wash but later engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi (c.1480-1534) and issued as prints (Fig. 2). The provenance and dating of the original work are both inconclusive but Vasari mentions that before he left Rome in 1524, Giulio designed the scene for his friend and financial consultant Baldassarre Turini's Villa Lante.[48] An inventory of prints made by Raimondi subsequent to Raphael's death in 1520 includes

[48] See G. Vasari, *Le Vita de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni dell 1550 e 1568,* (trans. G. du C. de Vere), New York, 1999, pp. 133-38 stating that Romano was the architect of this Villa Lante project which was built in 1518.

one based upon this original drawing but none of the reproduced prints are known to have survived. Frederick Hartt speculates that the drawing was executed after the artist left Rome and contemporaneously with the artist's notorious 1523 series of sixteen erotic *I modi* images (Figs. 8-11).[49] Those drawings depicting heterosexual couples from myths and legends in sixteen positions of sexual intercourse are known to have been executed for Federico II Gonzaga's new Palazzo Te in Mantua.[50] The exact dating of *Apollo and Cyparissus* is open to speculation, but we do know that the original published edition of sixteen images of *I modi* in printed form led to the engraver Raimondi's imprisonment in 1524 by Pope Clement VII. Romano was not prosecuted since, unlike Raimondi, his original drawings were not intended for public consumption but for the private enjoyment of his patron. Aretino then composed sixteen explicit sonnets to accompany the engravings, and secured Raimondi's release from prison. *I modi* were then published a second time in 1527, but on this occasion with the poems that have given them the traditional English title *Aretino's Postures*, making this the first time erotic text and images were combined. Raimondi escaped prison on this occasion, but the suppression and destruction of known existing copies was comprehensive.[51]

Giulio's *Apollo and Cyparissus* drawing therefore appears to be the original and there are no known extant engravings (Fig. 2). The scene depicts an older seated and cloaked Apollo with a nude juvenile Cyparissus on his lap. Apollo's right hand touches the youth's face whilst their lips meet in a kiss. Apollo's left hand is placed in Cyparissus' groin and the index finger seems to touch the boy's penis. The fabric of Apollo's garment separates the two figures as Cyparissus straddles his left knee.

[49] See F. Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, New Haven, 1958, p. 252.
[50] See B. Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton, 1999, pp. 71-79 on the sequence of *I modi* and their subsequent engraving by Raimondi.
[51] Talvacchia, 1999, pp. 71-79.

Apollo's legs are spread with feet placed on the ground. The youth's right foot is also placed on the ground but the left is raised. Cyparissus holds an upright archery bow in his left hand whilst a musical bow lies abandoned in the foreground of the composition. The stringed musical instrument which this would accompany leans neglected against the rock on which the pair are seated. The neck of which terminates in a carving of a serpent's head pointing in the direction of a clothed and classically draped female onlooker to the far right of the composition. This female figure inserts her left index finger in her mouth as she covertly witnesses their embrace. Her expression is ambiguous but there is little expressive indication of shock or outrage. All the protagonists are positioned in the middle ground but there is a large tree which divides the central background.

Apollo and Hyacinth by Benvenuto Cellini

Selected Historiography

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book X[52] and Cellini's own *Vita* are the two key literary sources for this chapter.[53] We know from this autobiographical *Vita* that Cellini began his memoirs after he was charged with sodomy in 1557, when sentenced to four years'

[52] This chapter uses excerpts from the Loeb translated version of Ovid's epic poem to support its central argumentations.

[53] Cellini's autobiographical *Vita*, which is widely thought to have been intended both as an *apologia* aimed at winning back the trust of the court in order to gain further commissions from the Medici, and as a document of his accomplishments. The *Vita* manuscript, which was dictated in 1562 to an assistant while Cellini sculpted, was not published at the time because of strained relations with Cosimo I. Cellini appears to have added sections to it around 1566–7. Contemporaries such as Giorgio Vasari knew of its existence but only a small élite, including Benedetto Varchi, had the privilege of reading it. Later the manuscript was printed in Italian in 1728 after it was believed lost, and formed the basis of Francesco Tassi's fundamental edition, Florence, 1829. Translations followed in English in 1771, German in 1796 and French in 1822. The version used in this thesis is the second edition of the 1956 translation by J. Addington-Symonds, London, 1995, which includes introduction and notes by Pope-Hennessy. In addition to the *Vita*, Cellini left a number of other writings on art, as well as letters and 142 poems of mediocre quality, some on sexual themes between males. These are published in the collected edition of Cellini's literary works by Maier, 1968, and Ferrero, 1971. Wherever it has been possible to test the events related in the *Vita* against other sources, Cellini's account has been verified.

imprisonment and under house arrest, and it ends abruptly around the year 1563 when he was approximately 63 years old. Written in an energetic, direct, and colourful style, Cellini's *Vita* gives a detailed account of his extraordinary career and tumultuous life, as well as his loves, hatreds, passions, and delights. Sometimes selective and tendentious in its reconstruction of events, the *Vita* nevertheless is considered a largely truthful document. The information disclosed in the *Vita* will be discussed more fully in order to construct a more expanded account of Cellini's character as this chapter develops.

Other textual evidence of the ways in which pederasty pervaded sexual and social relations between men in classical antiquity can also be found in several classical texts, including Plato who states in his *Republic*:

> It does not become a lover to forget that all adolescents in some sort sting and stir the amorous lover of youth and appear to him deserving of his attention and desirable…but the euphemistic invention of some lover who can feel no distaste for sallowness when it accompanies the blooming time of youth? And, in short, there is no pretext you do not allege and there is nothing you shrink from saying to justify you in not rejecting any who are in the bloom of their prime.[54]

In Plato's *Symposium* love for a young man was idealised as 'heavenly love' having special qualities that set it apart from the 'common' love of women.[55] Yet, Foucault states classical antiquity was: 'unable to be either tolerant or intolerant towards homosexuality for the good reason that they had no idea what homosexuality was. They did not classify sexual conduct according to sex, but according to social class and the categories of activity and passivity'.[56] As perspicacious readings of ancient Greek and

[54] E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Princeton, 1961, p. 474.
[55] Plato's *Symposium*, quoted in Hamilton and Cairns, 1961, p. 82.
[56] Foucault, (Vol.1), (1976), pp. 1-14.

Roman sources reveal, the *erastes* - *eromenos* relationship was based upon dyadic mentorship fundamental to that culture's social and educational system.[57] This model with its own complex socio-sexual etiquette was an important social institution among the upper classes of antiquity. Just as Apollo was the eternal *erastes*, as Bernard Sergent notes: 'Loved by a man and three gods, Hyacinthus was the paradigm for the *erōmenoi* of the human generations to come …the death of the hero, far from being the end of life, is a transition, a passage, from the beardless, adolescent *erōmenos* to that of bearded and therefore, implicitly, *erastēs*'. [58]

Most other scholarship on the matter of Cellini's oeuvre has been concerned primarily with the artist's versatility and virtuosity. Perhaps because this work was Cellini's first foray into marble carving, past scholarship has largely dismissed the importance of *Apollo and Hyacinth* in general and reference to its erotic aspects is exceedingly timid. James Saslow does refer briefly to *Apollo and Hyacinth* in *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* but reads it as 'not overtly sexual', and considers the lovers' relationship in terms of how 'the standing male nude Apollo plays with the kneeling boy's hair'.[59] The standard monograph of Cellini remains that by John Pope-Hennessy which integrates a discussion of a variety of textual sources with the artist's surviving works.[60] Pope-Hennessy's approach to *Apollo and Hyacinth* has much to commend it since he provides a full description of the work together with an informative account of Cellini's tumultuous life. Absent from this otherwise comprehensive study, however, is any discussion of the homoerotic allure of both the sculpture and the Ovidian source of its subject.

[57] J. Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love*, London, 2007.
[58] Sergent, 1987, pp. 85-8.
[59] Saslow, 1986, p. 152.
[60] J. Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini*, London, 1985.

Critique of Published Scholarship

This chapter illuminates the manifestation and significance of the homoerotic aspects of Cellini's life and works in order to situate *Apollo and Hyacinth* within a detailed and appropriate historical, social and personal context. The nature of Apollo's relationship with Hyacinth in the Ovidian narrative, as well as the need for identification of the homoerotic elements at play in *Apollo and Hyacinth*, seems to be neglected, if not intentionally obfuscated, in almost all academic discourse on Cellini's work. One of the most inquiring studies of Cellini's oeuvre is Michael Cole's *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*.[61] However, Cole's contribution is vexing in its effort to comprehend in any broad way Cellini's own sexual impulses, or to understand *Apollo and Hyacinth* as a subject in relation to the homoerotic theme of its Ovidian narrative. His observations on *Apollo and Hyacinth* are largely limited to Cellini's occupational circumstances and professional trajectory. Focusing upon *Apollo and Hyacinth* as Cellini's first independent work in stone and claiming it to be one of the artist's more inferior pieces, Cole sees the sculptural group as the artist's attempt to 'redefine himself as a master of the profession his rivals had been working on since they were children'.[62] Fundamentally eliding the homoerotic dimensions of the narrative, Cole postulates that just as Apollo was a victor over poor Hyacinth, so too was the artist demonstrating that he was the consummate master of the difficult medium of marble. Cole passes over the erotic allure of *Apollo and Hyacinth* in favour of a reading solely concerned with the artist's professional circumstances when he contends:

> Cellini lets his Apollo read as a claim about his own artistic competence. Implying victory over both the stone itself and the dominant mode of Florentine marble sculpture, the Apollo asserts a new field for

[61] M. Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*, Cambridge, 2005.
[62] Cole, 2002, p. 83-85.

> Cellini's own artistic force, the command of a field beyond that of the metal-worker. [63]

Cole suggests the work speaks chiefly to the question of what difficulties were presented to Cellini by the marble, stating: 'the figure of Hyacinth, sunk to his knees and seemingly helpless, its lower legs struck to the ground, was only added as support at the back, allowing the figure of Apollo to present himself frontally to the viewer'.[64] Moreover, Cole claims that Cellini only chose Apollo turning Hyacinth into a flower as a 'compromise' when faced with stone of inferior quality, calling the presence of the boy 'an infelicitous, ad hoc, and even nonsensical idea adopted in the face of the difficulties presented'.[65] Indeed, the question of the technical and conceptual leap involved in Cellini's transition to marble carving is not without importance. It cannot be denied that Hyacinth does function as technical support for the group but I would argue that this technical challenge could just as easily have been overcome through other strategies such as inclusion of a supporting tree trunk, rock formation or other inanimate structure.[66] Cole claims that the inclusion of Hyacinth merely 'serves statical ends, absorbing some of the weight that otherwise would have to be carried by Apollo's thin legs'.[67] By discounting the relevance of the homoerotic aspects of its Ovidian source with his remark that there is 'no narrative or thematic rationale to Hyacinth's presence', I believe Cole overlooks many of the group's important conceptual factors relating to the ways in which sexual acts during the Renaissance were understood exclusively in terms of domination and submission.[68] Certainly, Cellini's compositional strategy does follow a familiar theme in Renaissance statuary where a vertical figure stands

[63] Cole, 2002, p. 117.
[64] Cole, 2002, p. 83.
[65] Cole, 2002, p. 83.
[66] Cole, 2002, p. 83.
[67] Cole, 2002, p. 85.
[68] Cole, 2002, p. 85.

triumphantly over the kneeling figure he has just killed in precedents such as his own *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (1545), and other depictions of vanquishing heroes such as Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* (1534) (Figs. 12-13). I contend that as a bearer of complex meanings and multivalent resonances, *Apollo and Hyacinth* (1545) is not merely another statue of 'killer and killed', as Cole posits.[69] The perspectives offered in this chapter reach well beyond this author's suppositions by inviting fresh consideration of how this work encapsulates the cultural representation of sexual desire between men and how it intersects with the demarcation of appropriate Renaissance gender and power constructs.

Margaret Gallucci's *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy* makes a more constructive contribution to the context of this thesis because she considers closely the nature and consequence of the artist's sexual predilections which, as his *Vita* testifies, was the artist's most urgent drive after his passion for art. Unlike most discourse on Cellini, Gallucci confronts the problems that arise in how to classify his sexuality and how to understand the celebration of violence and sodomy in his writing. Gallucci's study is of considerable importance because it contextualises Cellini's artistic and literary oeuvres in light of contemporary issues and practices of sodomy, law, honour and masculinity by offering an historical framework in which to define and explain the artist's thoughts and motivations. In contrast to Cole, Gallucci perceives Cellini's self-promotion and self-fashioning in his *Vita* as a deliberate response to this conviction for sodomy.[70] By carefully analysing Cellini's rhetoric about his own life and works, Gallucci provides a wealth of insights and a broad context through which to interpret further the relationship between his

[69] Cole, 2002, p. 85.
[70] M. Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy*, New York, 2003.

literary and artistic oeuvres. Whereas the principal overriding theme of Cole's study is an attempt to demonstrate that in the creation of specific sculptural works Cellini was providing commentaries on the act of sculpture itself, Gallucci offers a discussion of Cellini as a self-professed sodomite and of sodomy laws and practices in Florence during his time. In her view, Cellini would have been mindful of contemporary codes of honour and masculinity, where the defence of one's honour and masculinity were privileges of the elite and powerful: 'in Cellini's time masculinity, like femininity, was not so much a role as the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex history is closely linked to discipline, regulation and punishment.' [71]

Taking as her point of reference textual sources such as Cellini's autobiography and poetry rather than specific artistic creations, Gallucci's innovative and theoretically sophisticated assessment of Cellini as a social and sexual transgressor offers an interesting hypothesis about this pivotal figure's writing and personal life. Indeed, Gallucci's argument becomes particularly germane when applied to a comprehensive interpretation of the gender ideology demonstrated in *Apollo and Hyacinth*. Just as Gallucci perceives Cellini's writings as 'self-presentation as a violent braggart, placing him within a larger field of masculine behaviour and considers misogyny and manliness in Renaissance culture', it seems safe to speculate that *Apollo and Hyacinth* surely conveys the same bold statement in visual form.[72] Significantly, there are also echoes of Foucault's perspective on the historical genealogy of homoerotic experience in the Renaissance in Gallucci's assertion 'in the Renaissance one's sexual preference was not the lynch-pin of one's identity. A male's choice of sexual partner did not condition the other choices he made or the roles he assumed in society'.[73] Gallucci's views become

[71] Gallucci, 2005, p. 3.
[72] Gallucci, 2005, pp. 3-5.
[73] Gallucci, 2005, p. 20.

all the more pertinent to my claim that the 'death' of Hyacinth in his youth and his rebirth as an adult male can be read as marking his readiness for marriage after development of sexual and spiritual innocence at the hands of an older male into the lived experience of adulthood. Because Gallucci's study is concerned with the manner in which many areas of Cellini's sexual and social life are integrated into his visual and literary output, I find her conclusions to be particularly significant for this study of *Apollo and Hyacinth*:

> For theorists and historians of gay history, Cellini represents a moment of resistance to the dominant cultural discourse of heterosexuality. He envisioned alternative models for male sexual experience and desire that took place alongside the enforced script of heteronormativity.[74]

Gallucci's hypotheses, grounded as they are in issues of gender, sexuality and identity, offer a far more persuasive and valuable framework for exploration of *Apollo and Hyacinth* than Cole's claim that the work chiefly alludes to Cellini's own artistic apotheosis. The manner in which Gallucci acknowledges Cellini's encoded references to power, gender and identity constructs in both his literary and artistic oeuvres provides a foundational source for my own study of the wealth of multivalent meanings and nuanced conceptual intricacies encapsulated in his *Apollo and Hyacinth*.

Contextualization and Analysis

Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinthus* can impart knowledge and help decode these early-modern sexual and social mores because the group is a remarkable *all' antica* example of how revolutionary Renaissance artistic interpretations of classical dialogue featuring the adult male and a much younger adolescent subject conflated erotic desire and

[74] Gallucci, 2005,p. 27.

philosophical allegory. It also demonstrates the manner in which these interpersonal dynamics of male desire and social relationships extended into the field of artistic representation. Renaissance understandings of sex and gender were not binary, but the binary opposition between men and women was strongly dependent on gender performance.[75] If erotic relations between men were not subject to constant scrutiny, masculinity certainly was, and *Apollo and Hyacinth* exemplifies how the manner in which the ideology of masculinity established certain fundamental principles across the social terrain. An adult male departing from the dominant definitions of masculinity by behaving effeminately or passively would upset gender orders and differences by his failure to adhere to these prescribed codes of exemplary masculinities and femininities. For a virile society such as sixteenth-century Florence, subjugation, domination and the imposition of one's will were considered defining characteristics. Sexual ethics and behaviour were governed not by the hetero-homosexual context but by the question of active-passive roles that were enmeshed with important behavioural codes associated with these hierarchal stratifications. *Apollo and Hyacinth* reflects these sexual and cultural specificities and it is in the light of this historically and culturally framed juridical visibility of male same-sex relations that the statue surely ought to be read.

However, any study of the statue's conception and execution should not be detached from our understanding of the circumstances under which male homoerotic relations were expressed in Renaissance Florence. A civic interpretation of *Apollo and Hyacinth* can be sustained by the way Cellini seemingly encapsulates and assumes the very identity of political hegemony when he imbues his Apollo with a sense of internal strength and character, along with virile physicality. Apollo's beautiful body is a somatic expression of internal qualities which underscore the notion that to be perceived

[75] See J. Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?' *History Workshop Journal 38*, 1994, pp. 184-92.

as the older, active penetrator in sexual intercourse with an adolescent boy did not tarnish masculine identities: on the contrary manliness and honour were affirmed. Similarly, a juvenile male such as Hyacinth could be dominated in a patriarchal society without incurring stigma because the subordination of the young is both natural and temporary in the social structure of a society where gender distinctions were important as social categories.

These contemporary social and cultural conventions played a principal role in what it meant to be male during Cellini's time.[76] In the Renaissance, the importance of adherence to prescribed gender roles was paramount, therefore how men behaved sexually contributed fundamentally to the shape of public life in a broader sense.[77] An understanding of the social history of sodomy in Florence is essential to grasp the ways in which realisation of political power is visually activated and characterised by Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth.*[78] Therefore, the importance of Rocke's findings cannot be overstated, because he demonstrates that the sodomy which most Florentines practised was strictly organised by age difference.[79] Even though it is recorded primarily through its prosecution, sodomy's prevalence in the city emerges clearly and the scope and scale of its proscription made it a public affair.[80] Elsewhere in Italy there were fewer prosecutions than in Florence because the penalties were more severe.[81] In

[76] In addition to Rocke's research, an account of sodomy in the Italian Renaissance can be located in V. Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, Durham and London, 2003, pp. 249-50; C. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, Durham and London, 1999, pp. 55-79; K. O'Donnell and M. O'Rourke; *Love, Sex, Intimacy and Friendship between Men, 1550-1800*, London, 2002, pp. 99-103.
[77] R. Mazo-Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 3-8.
[78] The alleged homoerotic inclinations and sexual conduct of many of Cellini's contemporaries have been extensively documented in both scholarly and popular texts. Many artists' homoerotic desires were fuelled by the apprenticeship / *bottega* system where adolescent boys were taken in by craftsmen willing to endow them with their artistic, worldly and, sometimes, sexual knowledge. See Gary Cestaro, ed., *Queer Italia: Same Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*, New York, 2004, pp. 76-77.
[79] Rocke, 1996, p. 4.
[80] Rocke, 1996, pp. 13-15.
[81] See T. Dean, *Crime and Justice in Late Medieval Italy*, Cambridge, 2007 and Halperin, 1990, pp. 29-38.

Rocke's findings, sodomy in general, and particularly its prosecution, was well documented in Florence but of particular note is the extent to which pederastic relationships emerge with vigour in the legislative records. From this Rocke has estimated that at least two-thirds of all Florentine males were implicated by the time they reached the age of forty, and these figures do not include the magistracies themselves. Rocke gleans from his survey of the judicial records evidence to suggest that out of the adult males implicated for homoerotic behaviour only 3 per cent had allowed themselves to be penetrated and only 12 per cent never married.[82] As a comment made by Domenico of Prato (1389-1432) pointing to the long standing prevalence of pederasty in court circles suggests, the love of adult men for youths was widespread; 'those marvellous competitions of fencing, tournaments and high jousts are no longer furiously performed for women; he who best can, now does his shows for young lads'.[83] These statistics confirm that the pederastic scenes studied in this chapter have a particular contemporary social and sexual context which invites further investigation.

Sodomy was one of the most passionately debated moral issues of Renaissance society.[84] However, in order to contextualise the historical contingency of Foucault's claim that 'the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'[85], it is necessary to define and explore the extent to which certain sexual acts were individually evaluated and categorised in the early modern period. Foucault uses the axis of sodomy to give definitional clarity but during the Renaissance the mimetic

[82] Rocke, 1996, pp. 154, 186, 156, 95.
[83] A. Segre, 'I dispacci di Cristofo da Piacenza, procuratore mantovano alla corte pontificale', *Archivia storico italiano*, Ser. 5: t.10 (1892), pp. 4-85.
[84] For an account of the persecution and punishment of sodomy see B.U. Hergemöller, *Sodom and Gomorrah: On the Everyday Reality and Persecution of Homosexuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. J. Phillips, London, 2001.
[85] Foucault, 1976, p. 43.

and exchangeable function of the label 'sodomy' was more accurately aligned to many acts perceived as sinning against the legally established and enforced social organisations of procreation. During the early modern period 'sodomy' found special favour as a term of accusation for 'that sin against nature' and was often used synonymously with male homoerotic activity at this time, but these too are problematic idioms because they did not refer exclusively to sex between males. This biblical term, consecrated by moral invectives and theological teaching, covers actions not limited to homoerotic practices, therefore those with certain sexual preferences at a particular stage in their development should not be forced to retrospectively occupy modernity's familiar sexual categories. The early modern sodomite had been someone who was perceived as sinning by performing a certain sexual act without reproduction, contrary to the view of the church that the two should be inextricably enmeshed.[86] In April 1424, Bernardino of Siena, who was a Franciscan friar and one of the period's most celebrated preachers, delivered a series of consecutive sermons in the city of Florence attacking the vice of sodomy. Every human calamity, he said, could be ascribed to this terrible sin, from flooding and warfare to disease and death - and God would take his revenge by raining down fire on the city as on Sodom and Gomorrah.[87] In one of his sermons, Bernardino instructed the congregation to deride sodomites by spitting when sodomy was spoken of:

> Whenever you hear sodomy mentioned each and every one of you spit on the ground and clean your mouth out well. If they won't change their ways otherwise, maybe they'll change when they're

[86] For explanation of the early modern context of sodomy see J. Goldberg, (ed.), *Reclaiming Sodom*, New York and London, 1994, pp. 3-6; J. Goldberg, *Queering the Renaissance*, Durham and London, 1994 pp. 12-15.
[87] F. Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, 1999, p. 43.

> ridiculed. Spit hard! Maybe the water they spit will
> extinguish their fire. Like this, everyone spit hard.[88]

It should be remembered, however, that the term was not privileged as the sole locus of homoerotic practice. Sodomy was a universalising and multivalent category referring to many different acts, such as masturbation, penile-oral congress, coitus interruptus and anal intercourse between heterosexual partners, all of which were grouped together with bestiality. Even heterosexual intercourse in any variant other than the male-superior position was an act of sodomy because of perceived lessening of the chances of conception.[89] The sexual landscape of Renaissance Italy was entrenched by concupiscence, in its narrow sense of sinfully libidinous desire or lust. Erotic desire, in whatever form, constituted a significant problem for Christian thinkers who advocated that sexual desire was closely linked to sin with desire, arousal and sexual acts seen as causing the soul to be diverted on its path to the divine.[90] The sexual standards enunciated by those theologians who were most explicitly condemnatory of libidinous activity between males meant that heterosexual intercourse between a Christian and a Jew, or a Christian and a Muslim, although potentially procreative, were also sometimes labelled as sodomy because such 'infidels' were perceived as being unnatural and the equivalent to dogs and other animals. Foucault theorises that: 'confession, the examination of conscience, all of the insistence on the secrets and the importance of the flesh, was not simply a means of forbidding sex or of pushing it as far as possible from consciousness, it was a way of placing sexuality at the heart of existence and of connecting salvation to the mastery of sexuality's obscure movements. Sex was, in

[88] G. Kent and G. Hekma, (eds.), *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, London, 1989, p. 7.
[89] See J. Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*, Stanford, 1992; S. Licata and R.P. Patterson, *The Gay Past*, New York, 2013, pp. 60-5.
[90] See Wolfthal, 2010, pp. 12-30.

Christian societies that which had to be examined, watched over, confessed and transformed into discourse.'[91]

In fact, any sexual activity that would not result in conception was considered 'unnatural', and as such these disapproved acts were collectively grouped together and named 'sodomy', which is derived from one of the two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed by God in the Old Testament.[92] Nevertheless, the efforts of church and state failed to eradicate forbidden male same-sex erotic tendencies and this outlawed behaviour and its representation in the visual domain evolved and survived in a hostile milieu entrenched in the Church's position of intransient absolutism. The activities portrayed were often at odds with ecclesiastic morality and social propriety and can be viewed as signifiers of the difference between officially professed ideology and actual praxis that existed at this time.

Cellini's Sexual Propensity & Conviction

The crux of this chapter's claims rests upon the proposition that as a mythic paradigm of ideal masculine behaviour, Cellini's group is a rich source for understanding broader issues such as power dynamics and behavioural codes relating to contemporary matters concerning identity, gender and sexuality. However, *Apollo and Hyacinth* is likely to have also reflected its creator's own homoerotic sentiments. When one studies this work it is possible to see it as the visual manifestation of Gallucci's claim that 'Cellini displaces martial masculinity into artistic enterprise'.[93] As Gallucci observes, Cellini testified in his *Vita* that he took 'the active dominant role in sodomical sex, whether

[91] 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self', in J.R. Carrette, ed., *Religion and Culture; Michel Foucault*, New York, 1999, pp. 169-81.
[92] Biblical references to sodomy are to be found in *Leviticus* 18:22 and 20:13, *Deuteronomy* 22:5 and 23:18, *Vetus Latina*, *Romans* 1:18-32 , *Corinthians* 6:9, *Titus* 1:10 and *Timothy* 1:10.
[93] Gallucci, 2005, pp. 3-5.

with boys or women'.[94] It can be therefore be argued that the group conforms to these prescribed codes of manliness, but also reiterates the association of masculinity with violence and domination through his development of 'the popular image of the artist as fearless adventurer and shameless seducer'.[95]

Cellini's masculinity is expressed in his art and it is also known from his *Vita* that he did not have an exclusive preference for women. The sexual horizon against which Cellini himself moved is personified in the way his writings are permeated with violent boasting and transgressive behaviour, including celebration of the joys and omnipresence of sodomy. One important indicator of the personal significance *Apollo and Hyacinth* held for Cellini, which has been previously disregarded in published commentaries on the group, is its mention in a sonnet he wrote whilst in prison for sodomy:

> Oh Phoebus, you know well that the first art did that which all agree is healthiest, for reciprocal love is a human thing, and it distribute seven sweeter virtues. Your fleeing Daphne unhappily shares the never healing wound with your beautiful Hyacinth, she who, for great error, keeps to herself, away from all, and who shares her flowers and fronds with many people.
>
> Worry no longer over who she may give such things, for you have given away the arrows the bow and the lyre; nor do you want anyone to steal them from you. Those little boys are sour and harsh to me, for they, along with time, have drained me of my strength; my third flame is in this great dark dwelling place.[96]

[94] Gallucci, 2005, p. 39.
[95] Gallucci, 2002, p. 2.
[96] G. Ferraro, (ed.), *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini*, Turin, 1980, pp. 951-52.

The *Vita* informs us that under command from Cosimo, Cellini received the marble from his hated rival Bandinelli after a quarrel over each sculptor's virtuosity. During this quarrel Cellini was accused of being 'a dirty sodomite' .[97] In his *Vita*, Cellini is preoccupied with his disposition as the exemplar of courtly behaviour, with almost constant self-presentation as the epitome of masculine sexual prowess, domination and control. Doubtless because of the possibility of prosecution, Cellini avoided admitting to sodomy in Cosimo's presence, but with sardonic defiance retorted to the slur of his accuser:

> Such a noble practice [*una cosi nobile arte*]: after all, we read that Jove enjoyed it with Ganymede in paradise, and here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and the greatest kings of the world. I'm an insignificant, humble man, I haven't the means or the knowledge to meddle in such a marvellous matter.[98]

Cellini's reputation was clearly important since his economic livelihood was dependent on it. Although his response was not an admission to being a sodomite, it was hardly a fervent denial. Therefore, it seems safe to surmise that, in a world where playing the passive role equated with a preference for being a woman, *Apollo and Hyacinth* might well have been intended as visual affirmation of his own active, and thus dominant, status. Violence and sodomy were prominent idioms in Cellini's writing; therefore one can readily conjecture that Cellini might well have referenced his own sexual impulses in *Apollo and Hyacinth* also. Sexual performance is of course a part of

[97] Cellini, *Vita*, p. 338.
[98] Cellini, *Vita*, pp. 416-17.

the definition of virility but, as Cellini was to discover, even this virility is not without anxiety.

One likely reason that *Apollo and Hyacinth* remained in Cellini's possession without a purchase from Cosimo, is the artist's conviction for sodomy in 1557. Although Cellini had written earlier, it was after this that he wrote prolifically, as if, perhaps, substituting his artistic oeuvre for literary output as a form of self-expression. This was Cellini's second conviction for sodomy, earning him a fine of fifty gold *scudi,* four years in prison, and a ban for life from holding public office.[99] From prison, Cellini wrote to his patron Duke Cosimo, and obtained a commutation of his prison term to a one year period of house arrest.[100] Nevertheless, the prosecution effectively ended his career because after this the only sculpture he produced was a marble crucifix for his own tomb.[101] As Cellini discovered, to have been the one who penetrates others, regardless of their sex, would have been perceived as playing the appropriate male role. But by repeatedly committing sodomy over a sustained period of five years with a younger, but now adult, male named Fernando di Montepulciano, Cellini infringed gender expectations since it appeared they were living 'as though he were a wife'.[102] The sentence passed on Cellini is indicative of how, in Renaissance Florence, to behave or be used like a woman in this way would have been deemed reprehensible:

[99] Cellini omits to mention in his *Vita* that he was previously prosecuted and ordered to pay 12 *staia* of flour in January 1523 for having sexual relations with an apprentice named Giuliano da Ripa. Details of the offence were reported in L.Greci, *Quaderni dell'archivo di anthropologia criminale e medicina legale*, Rome, 1930, pp. 16-24. Also see, I. Arnaldi, *La vita violenta di Benvenuto Cellini*, Bari, 1986.
[100] Cellini's trial and imprisonment for sex crimes and other unlawful offenses can be found in Paolo L. Rossi, 'The Writer and the man. Real crimes and mitigating circumstances; Il Caso Cellini' in T. Dean and K. J. P. Lowe, *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 157-183.
[101] Cellini does not comment in his *Vita* on the reasons for this conviction either, but he does make several references to the celebration of his relationships with youths and his love of male beauty. Of Francesco Lippi 'in working together, such a great love was born between us, that never, neither day or night, were we apart'. Of Piero Landi, Cellini declared 'we loved each other more than if we had been brothers' and that Albertaccio del Bene 'loved me as much as himself' (Benvenuto Cellini, *La Vita*, ed., L. Belloto, Parma, 1996, p. 46).
[102] For this accusation, see details of Cellini's sentencing below.

> (Saturday 27 February 1557). Item in the same manner because this magistracy has examined a denunciation against Benvenuto, son of Master Giovanni Cellini, sculptor and Florentine citizen, as it appears in the book of denunciations numbered 287 on page 32, which states that for about five years this Cellini had kept his boy Fernando di Giovanni da Montepulciano, who he has used most frequently sexually engaging in the most despicable vice of sodomy, keeping him in bed as if he were his wife, and also because there is in the possession of the court the written confession of the said Benvenuto, as can be read in the files of the complaint numbered 154, where he confesses that he sodomised the said Fernando; thus in accordance with the law this court condemns the said Benvenuto to pay a fine of 50 golden scudi to the Treasury of His Most Illustrious Excellency as is the protocol and to serve four years in prison known as the Stinche from the day he will have presented himself there and strips him for life of holding office, following the tenor of the said laws. Convicted with a vote of seven black beans. Notified on 2 March to me the undermentioned chancellor. Sent to the Treasury as requested. The Secretary [Francesco Borghini] noted that his confinement is assigned to his house because he can serve the said sentence as His Excellency ruled.[103]

It seems that either Cellini's homoerotic solicitations had become too frequent and conspicuous for the authorities to ignore, or the accusation came from Fernando himself as a lover scorned when Cellini struck him off as heir to his will in 1556. For only a few months before the denunciation, in June 1556, Cellini dismissed Fernando, stating: 'I deprive him of everything I have done for him. I do not wish him to receive anything of

[103] Sentence of the Otto di Guardia Convicting Cellini of Sodomy, (27th February 1557), published in L. Greci, 'Benvenuto Cellini nei delitti e nei processi fiorentini ricostruiti attraverso le leggi del tempo, *Archivo di Antropologia Criminale*, 2nd ser. 50, no. 4, Rome, 1930, cited in Gallucci, 2005, pp. 39-40.

mine. Any bequest in my Will shall be annulled'.[104] Whatever other contributing factors might have exacerbated Cellini's demise, it seems most likely that Cellini's greatest transgression was the long standing arrangement he had with Fernando because their relationship was not transient, experimental or intergenerational.[105] The extent of any punishment against Fernando is unknown, but as the adult passive partner it was he, not Cellini, who would have been deemed as the most transgressive because he assumed the woman's role and thereby abdicated his gender. As Rocke informs us, in Florence where sexual activity between men was expected to be temporary and cyclical, there were harsher penalties levied upon adults who continue homoerotic activities with those who are beyond youth.[106] It was considered degrading to remain a passive agent once a grown man, therefore only as long as if the passive partner were a boy could he expect leniency.[107]

In Cellini's case, his severe punishment could also reflect other contributing factors as well as his habitual and more intense homoerotic activity with the same partner over a long period of time. In a poem written whilst he was imprisoned, there is a hint that Cellini himself might have suspected that his vicious temper and outspoken manner might have influenced his prosecution: 'some say I am here because of Ganymede, others because my tongue is too fierce'.[108] Nonetheless, the definitively homoerotic *Apollo and Hyacinth* was ultimately not bought by Cosimo, and from the point of this prosecution Cellini's artistic career suffered irreparably.[109]

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[104] An account of Cellini's wills is cited in F. Tassi, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini* (Volume iii), Florence, 1829, pp. 67-74.
[105] Gallucci, 2003, p. 125.
[106] Rocke, 1996, pp. 14, 10, 4.
[107] Rocke, 1996, pp. 321-65.
[108] The sonnet begins 'Già tutti I Santi, ancor Saturno e Giove' and is quoted in M. Plaisance, *Culture et politique à Florence de 1542 à 1551*, Paris, 1973 and also in André Rouchon, 'Lasca et les Humidi aux prises avec l'Académie Florentine' in *Les Écrivains et le Pouvoir en Italie à l'époque de la Renaissance*, 2nd ser. Paris, 1974, p. 155, n. 23.
[109] Cellini, *Vita*, pp. 273-345.

Additional Interpretive Frameworks

Given his personal circumstances Cellini might have used the pederastic Ovidian mythological narrative of Apollo's doomed love for Hyacinth, with all its analogies of prowess and pathos, to make implicit claims about the importance he placed on male sexual relationships in his own life. But Cellini's statue should not be seen solely as an illustration or reflection of a text or a textual tradition because it offers insights into the broader workings of Renaissance Florence, as well as its male culture of public and private, fraternal, filial and sexual affections which drew men together and determined their political culture. Examination of the compositional intricacies at play within *Apollo and Hyacinth* indicate that the work seems to possess a broad but specific range of prescriptive behaviours fundamental to both the social and sexual situations of an age when manliness and honour was inextricably enmeshed with social identity and public reputation. Cellini uses figural stasis and compositional dynamism in the manner he appropriates and modulates the basic pose of a canonically-posed Apollo who adopts a dominant stance over the acquiescent Hyacinth who kneels in subjugation at his feet. The juvenile boy Hyacinth is almost rooted to the ground in anticipation of his metamorphosis at the hand of his mentor and lover, thereby visually informing and communicating recognised cultural parameters and norms relating to old /young, active / passive, masculine / feminine and master / servant roles.[110]

By bringing to the fore the performative aspect of the work, Cellini positions the kneeling Hyacinth behind rather than in front, or even at the side of his master and

[110] Insightful information on pre-modern behavioural and sexual paradigms is to be found in J. C. Brown and R.C. Davis, *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, London and New York, 1998; K. Crawford, *European Sexualities 1400-1800*, Cambridge, 2007; L. Fradenburg and C. Freccero, *Premodern Sexualities*, New York and London, 1996. For the definitive commentary on expected courtly virtues see B. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull, London, 1976.

mentor, in a manner that suggests gender constructs and power dynamics are consciously affirmed (Fig. 14). *Apollo and Hyacinth* invokes the notion that far from being a mutual experience, sexual activity always had a directional quality for males from both antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. Cellini reiterates this when, in contrast to the developed physique of the *contrapposto* Apollo who stares straight ahead whilst proudly displaying the attributes of manhood, he presents a kneeling pre-pubescent Hyacinth as a passive, reluctant, unaroused youth who is granted favour without any sign of sexual delectation whilst gazing adoringly up at his mentor and lover. If we think through this project in terms of medium, as a large three-dimensional rendering of the human body *Apollo and Hyacinth* possesses a certain corporeal tangibility that heightens spectatorial pleasure. Furthermore, the imprint of antiquity is signified through the robust materiality and very physical property of the marble itself, which had the ability to appeal to tactile as well as visual senses and elicit an erotic response.

These possibilities are bound up with the story of *Apollo and Hyacinth*, as well as the sociological prevalence of sodomy that Rocke's findings uphold. Such signifying elements lend support to the premise that Hyacinth's life ends as a juvenile at this moment and he awaits not literal metamorphosis into a flower, but his accession to adulthood. They also orient other ways of thinking about reading *Apollo and Hyacinth* as a paradigm for understanding the role played by the social outline of the relation one sees in the sculpture. Cellini's interpretation of Hyacinth's death, rebirth and immortalization could be the visual assertion of the procreative fecundity present in nature. The youth's death should be understood in terms of an archetypal rite of passage since it does not symbolise a real, biological death but rather it expresses the death of his adolescence. It is possible that Cellini alludes to this proposition when he poses Apollo as if turning away from his beloved in a manner that suggests because Hyacinth

is now transforming from his being as an adolescent into an adult, it is time to take his leave. Apollo was, after all, like all deities in ancient mythology the active partner and the one taking the initiative and obtaining sexual gratification. In classical mythology, it is always a human who serves as the subject of a deity's desire. Therefore, we might read Cellini's depiction of heroism, death and pathos as capturing ritualized male love and honoring the intrinsic significance of same-sex relationships with the visual validation that a love directed at members of one's own sex is true of the gods as well.

Ovidian poetry had a direct bearing on the Renaissance world of contingency, flux and perpetual metamorphosis and it can be argued that Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth* might also represent Florence's self-conception as a vulnerable yet victorious polity. Cellini renders ardour with imaginative directness in *Apollo and Hyacinth,* but the work's libidinal aspects and its configuration of gender roles also need to be squared with the statue's possible political and public functions. Encoded within *Apollo and Hyacinth,* Cellini may offer an allegorical personification of the prevalent Florentine political circumstances. The representation of a powerful, benevolent, life-giving Apollo could not but have struck a strong political chord amongst a populace attuned to the Medici promotion of itself. Read in this way, Apollo can be understood as speaking with the voice of an oligarchic regime and as the divine embodiment of characteristics fundamental to sixteenth-century Florentine hierarchal society where the imposition of one's will and refusal to accept subjugation were important political and civic codes.[111]

Firstly, Apollo's physical prowess, as the aesthetic embodiment of an ideal male invokes the health and splendour of Medici patriarchal domination whilst also presenting vigorous symbolism of the state and its policies. Hence, the group can be

[111] See R. Crum and J. Paoletti, *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, Cambridge, 2006.

read as the visual embodiment of the virtue of a hegemonic body politic. Secondly, the statue could personify a wealth of characteristics redolent with the expected behavioural codes promoted by the Medici as the city's honourable and powerful patriarchal oligarchy through its alloy of love and authority enmeshed with the finest virtues of strength, courage, vitality, nobility, energy and intelligence,. By juxtaposing the acquiescently positioned Hyacinth against the *grazia* of Apollo's classical contrapposto pose, Cellini might be alluding to the older protagonist's conspicuous mastery and psychological supremacy to further evoke the theme of Florence's enemies' subjugation to a dominant force.

The currency of the ideal male body in visual culture was one of the shaping determinants of Renaissance culture.[112] So when Cellini pairs nudity with adolescent youthfulness in *Apollo and Hyacinth*, he appropriates and modulates the characteristic expression of ideal manhood and thus identifies with the paradigms of classical antiquity that figured so prominently in Renaissance culture. The rhetoric of the notion of the ruler in Renaissance Italy was saturated in classical imagery; therefore political references embedded within the statue were likely to be apparent at some level. Cellini reflects Renaissance desire to inscribe a civic relation to antiquity and some of the glory associated with its classical origins when he endows Apollo with strong, alert posture, noble proportions and well modelled classicising countenance. Cellini further marks Apollo's status as a deity by a series of visual codes which include the figure's stance and physique, together with the canonical head type featuring broad forehead, tousled hair and diadem. Such characteristics possess very similar iconographic coding to the

[112] A perceptive commentary on the subject of the body as metaphor in early-modern Italy is to be found in J. Hairston and W. Stephens, (eds.), *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, Baltimore, 2010. Also see, D. Herlihy, (ed.), *Medieval Culture and Society*, London, 1968.

Roman copy of *Apollo Belvedere* (c.130-140AD), and perhaps speak to the question of the importance Cellini put on the fulfilment of his vision of the antique precursor for *Apollo and Hyacinth* with an established model of monumental Apollonian figural form as the exemplum of virtue triumphant (Fig. 15) .

Furthermore, instead of looking down at the fallen Hyacinth, Apollo gazes in the distance in a manner reminiscent of the melancholic grace of Michelangelo's *David,* (1501), which in one sense invokes a worthy sense of *gravitas* but in another could suggest a readiness to seek out the next young, beautiful mortal adolescent as his love object (Figs. 1a & 16). Cellini's choice of white marble as a medium further reinforces the statue's claim to classical tradition. All these referents suggest Cellini's codification of his statue as a prototypical image giving visual form to Florence's desire for the freedom of an ideal antiquity and asserting claim to her cultural inheritance. Furthermore, the palpable psychological expressivity and implied dynamism of Cellini's patently youthful bodies aligns *Apollo and Hyacinth* with the Medici dynasty which always conceived of itself as youthful and striving but wholly confident of dominance. The interconnectedness of poetry, sex and politics that appears to be embedded within Cellini's statue seems to project civic symbolism alluding to this Medici supremacy, or for that matter Florence itself, as an entity which has the power, like Apollo, to both destroy and to nourish. This theme of dying and blossoming in *Apollo and Hyacinth* can be read in terms of its symbolic promotion of the Medici and as endorsing their self-assertion as the very identity of political hegemony responsible for Florence's political transformation from the dark days of republicanism. For an organisation which saw itself as the guardian of Florentine virtues, the sculpture could have been seen as conveying layered allusions which impute political meaning, civic relevance and matters of statecraft with its evocation of a solar artifice alluding to Cosimo's power and

Medici associations with the medicinal healing powers of Apollo.[113] For a family who produced and sustained their authority visually, the relationship between sexual and political identity which Cellini evoked in his statue might have had considerable appeal because it had the power to communicate in an unmediated fashion patriarchal structures of looking within a symbolic framework based on assumed definitions of gender appropriate behaviour.

This visualisation is fortified by *Apollo and Hyacinth*'s presumed intended spatial and ideological context. The work could have acquired additional meaning in very definite relation to the nature of the space Cellini might have hoped it would inhabit since the heraldic significance of the hyacinth flower has parallels with the omnipresent floral communal symbol of Florence. Such floriform allusions could suggest that when Cellini executed his sculptural group, he hoped that it might have suited the garden of Cosimo's villa where there could have been exposure to a moderately-sized audience. Certainly, the meta-social encounter that this sculpture could have produced in a garden locus seems suited to its Ovidian theme of agricultural plenty and procreativity. When looking down upon *Apollo and Hyacinth* from their villa, the Medici would have experienced it from a position of domination that would have invoked a correlation with Apollo's evocation of authority as the active male, but any audience would be aligned to the role of the passive Hyacinth when they approached the statue from a position of subjugation. It seems therefore reasonable to opine that Cellini could have conceived

[113] The heraldic emblem of Florence is the fleur-de-lis or white lily, which as an iconographic attribute of the Virgin symbolizes purity and chastity, thus its use in the visual arts draws on the Marian connotations of virtue and spirituality. Apollo was a solar deity who represents the sun because of his perceived power and strength. Although, the origin of the name Medici is uncertain, it is the plural of *medico* meaning "medical doctor". Just as the sun has healing properties, upon their return from exile in 1497 the Medici promoted their oligarchy as a remedy to the previous period to upheaval and civic unrest. All these characteristics and attributes are ones which Cosimo, and for that matter Florence itself, might well have wished to be associated with as a means of political propaganda.

Apollo and Hyacinth's strong code of sexual and social comportment and hierarchical-patriarchic configuration as the encapsulation of social divisions and status fundamental to both a hegemonic culture and Cosimo's power as *pater familias*.

The statue could well have solicited erotic projection to Cellini's contemporaries, but there are other political and social interpretive frameworks which call for it to be considered as a bearer of other complex and multi-layered resonances. One of these metaphoric and allegorical meanings is the manner in which the statue can be associated with Cellini's own virtuosity of metamorphosis when he transforms the inanimate marble into human likeness. This poetically charged process of transforming material into meaningful form takes on Ovidian connotations when the group is considered as capturing an analogous process. The statue is brought to life, and nascent humanity is born through a metamorphosis which translates marble into figurative form. Less obviously cued by Ovid, however, is the way in which the notion of sculpture as metamorphosis offers another parallel when we consider that Cellini himself sought to follow in the footsteps of his revered Michelangelo by developing his skills from that of a goldsmith to a sculptor. In Cellini's professional development and prowess as a stone-worker, it is the subject of *Apollo and Hyacinth* which he chooses to redefine himself as a sculptor of marble. Cellini's display of metamorphic virtuosity opens new possibilities for thinking about the work, and more specifically about the intelligence involved in his choice of subject matter. These possibilities can be further developed with the tentative suggestion that the work could be also interpreted in the spirit of the Medici court life in which Cellini sought to ingratiate himself. *Apollo and Hyacinth* also takes on social meaning for it suggests the transformation of rude matter into that which is nascent, polite or polished. This Ovidian sense of metamorphosis informs Cellini's transformation of the rustic world into a representation of refined artifice and urbane

sensibility that would have been expected of any artefact considered worthy of gracing the Medici court.

An alternative but narrower reading might interpret Cellini's bestowal of great importance on Apollo's right hand as a gesture of almost paternal authority and as signifying the instrument with which he teaches Hyacinth to become an accomplished adult (Fig.17). The antithetical meaning behind the gestures of taking and giving life has great significance in this work with Apollo's hand accidently having already taken away life, but at the same time still having the ability to reinstate it. Furthermore, for contemporary Renaissance audiences the death and resurrection of Hyacinth could have held some affinity with Christian beliefs. The notion of the hand of God as the instrument that gave life to humankind, as portrayed by Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, c.1508, for his famous fresco on the Sistine ceiling, provides a possible precursor for the moment when Apollo's hand reaches out to Hyacinth (Fig.18). Whereas the action of God's hand gives form to Adam, Apollo's gives form to Hyacinth's metamorphosis into adulthood. Just as God was the ultimate divine agent responsible for Christ's death and ascension to the heavens for eternal life, Apollo too, having already taken away life, divinely bestows immortality and restores it in another form.[114]

Cellini was operating at a time when principal interest in pederasty was viewed as phallic confirmation of the sociopolitical supremacy of adult citizen males, with each partner taking, expected to take, and wishing to be perceived as taking a prescribed role. Therefore, we can suppose that he recognized the need to render *Apollo and Hyacinth* in a manner which spoke to the question of those dominant definitions of masculinity despite the overtly homoerotic nature of the work. We can perhaps glean how much

[114] This thematic resonance with Michelangelo's ceiling fresco gains compositional analogy in the manner that the position and structure of Apollo's right hand is seemingly the mirror image of the left hand of Adam.

weight the artist gave to this association in the manner he renders Hyacinth as the construction and reaffirmation of passivity since he is portrayed as the penetrable and powerless partner whilst Apollo is the male embodiment of virile power in his role as the active, impenetrable and powerful older agent. Cellini celebrates an intensely erotic relationship between *Apollo and Hyacinth* and sets Florentine political sentiments within an amorous and allegorical register but remains mindful of the fact that tolerance of erotic activity between men depended on whether expression of these relations violated culturally defined and accepted conventions. However, we can develop these theoretical perspectives further through consideration of the manner in which Cellini portrays the erotic aspect of Apollo's relationship with the adolescent Hyacinth.

One of the most homoerotic signifiers in Cellini's composition must surely be the way the artist anticipates an act of oral gratification when he poses Hyacinth with sensuously parted lips knelt at Apollo's feet with his head closely aligned as if turning towards the older agent's groin (Figs.1c & 19). The homoerotic character of the group is further augmented in the way that Hyacinth strokes Apollo's buttocks with his right finger (Fig. 20). Furthermore, the same hand grasps a phallic shaped object, perhaps a branch, in a manner that suggests a masturbatory act (Fig. 21). At a cursory glance, the gesture of Apollo's hand on the youth's head might be viewed as a token of affection. But such a reductive interpretation only holds currency if one reads the subject out of its literary context of homoerotic love and obfuscates Cellini's own male sexual impulses as well as disregarding the social and sexual taxonomies revealed in contemporary textual and prosecutorial records.

As Rocke informs us, the legal records show that oral sex between males was a particular concern of prosecutors in Cellini's time.[115] Dominant tropes regarding fellatio, as with other erotic acts between males, remained determined above all else by age and status, as Cellini demonstrates in the statue's hierarchical configuration. However, and somewhat surprisingly, the judicial records quoted by Rocke incontrovertibly indicate that a pattern existed as the norm for the act of fellatio where it was the juvenile's penis that was inserted in the older agent's mouth.[116] Whilst it might appear that the rebellious and boastful Cellini was invoking the notion of fellatio in *Apollo and Hyacinth*, it should be noted that the pair does not observe the usual Renaissance paradigm for male oral gratification.[117] Instead, Cellini's model recalls that of classical Greece and Rome when to be the active inserter in genital oral sex incurred no serious disesteem. At this time, to fellate a youth deemed unacceptable as this was an inferior role with entailed passive concentration on servicing another's pleasure and considered to be a role appropriate to women, slaves and prostitutes but never to free men.[118] In short, the paradigm of classical antiquity dictated that a grown man received oral pleasuring from a youth and that it was the adult that was the inserter in either anal or intercrural sex between the thighs.

In Florence the reverse was true of fellatio, signalling a sharp break with antique tradition. Records reveal that older men fellated the youths, thereby mitigating the ancient contempt for the fellator by preserving his posture as active partner, whereas in anal intercourse he would be the penetrator.[119] It would thus seem that during the

[115] Rocke, 1996, pp. 93-4.
[116] Rocke, 1996, p. 92.
[117] Rocke, 1996, pp. 234-53.
[118] For an account of oral sexual practice in classical antiquity see A. Karlen, *Sexuality and Homosexuality*, London, 1971, pp. 55-8.
[119] Rocke, 1996, p. 93.

Renaissance some characteristics of Florentine male homoeroticism, particularly this configuration for fellatio, pointed forward to modernity rather than backward to antiquity. Rocke sees this development as 'a new ethos of mutual enjoyment in homoerotic interactions …without yet breaking down the rigid separation of sexual roles typical of sodomy in this culture'.[120]

It would seem that Cellini eschews Renaissance expectations concerning oral gratification and reverses the typical orientation with his Hyacinth instead positioned with sensually parted mouth as if ready to orally receive Apollo's member. As discussed previously, anal penetration of an adult male was deemed effeminizing. However, an adult partner who allows boys to penetrate his mouth would not have been perceived as violating the gender order or seen as inverting prescribed phallic-centered conceptions of behavioral erotics. Whereas the adult male was expected to take the role of inserter role in anal intercourse, the criminal records testify this was not the case in oral gratification.[121] Ordinarily, the Renaissance recipient of semen in anal intercourse is passive but in oral intercourse he is active. There were different power dynamics attached to the act of being the fellator.[122] Rocke's statistical evidence suggests that 'in cases that overtly describe oral sex, it was usually the older partner who fellated and was thus phallically penetrated by the younger'.[123] Contrary to what might appear to be an act of supplication because of being orally penetrated, the act of taking the youth in his mouth would make the dominant older man the active agent in control and the one who can choose to give pleasure and take it away at will. In short, the dominant male remains the active agent committing the act whilst the younger remains passive because

[120] Rocke, 1996, p. 93.
[121] Rocke, 1996, pp. 101-9.
[122] Rocke, 1996, pp. 101-9.
[123] Rocke, 1996, p. 92.

he allows it to be committed. There is considerable validity in understanding fellatio as an experience where the adult male can arbitrarily decide to be the inserter himself or not. This form of fellatio can invoke a sense of psychological empowerment in the older male because by fellating the younger partner his power remains preserved and he retains full command of the subordinate younger boy with his learned skill of granting erotic gratification orally.

The reasons why Cellini chose to revert to the antique rather than contemporary model for his suggestive reference to oral sexual practice in *Apollo and Hyacinth* invite further speculation. Cellini, perhaps, chose to look backward toward antique precedents in order to signify that Apollo's pleasure in this pederastic relationship, as the older agent, was considered paramount. In doing so, he captures a difference in emotions between Apollo and Hyacinth which recalls those that Xenophon records in his *Symposium*: 'the boy does not share in a man's pleasure in intercourse; cold sober, he looks upon the other drunk with sexual desire'.[124] By presenting Hyacinth as the fellator rather than Apollo, Cellini might be offering an alternative model to Renaissance general practices of oral sexual experience between males with an ambivalent reference to his own rebellious erotic predilections. As one who seemed to enjoy, as Gallucci states 'violating existing norms in three areas: sexual, literary and artistic',[125] there is a possibility that Cellini 'without question, the most famous sodomite of all' uses the act of fellatio to pronounce a characteristically defiant statement in this personally significant and sensitive work.[126] As we have seen, Cellini could often manipulate prescribed sexual conventions to suit his own sexual preferences. It is therefore

[124] Xenophon, *Symposium*, 8.21, cited in Dover, 1978, p. 52.
[125] Gallucci, 2005, p. 3.
[126] Gallucci, 2005, p. 19.

conceivable that the artist has adopted a perceived subversive form of the act of fellatio in reference to his own personal choices and prerogatives regarding sexual roles. When Cellini diverges from usual contemporary formulaic behavioral configurations specific to the act of fellatio for *Apollo and Hyacinth*, he might well be visually reiterating the fact that it is Apollo's choices, as well as his own, as dominant males which dictate whatever form the act of fellatio might take.

In addition to these power and pleasure dynamics, fellatio could have been viewed as reiteration of the older agent's pedagogical and reproductive role as sexual mentor teaching the mastered nuances of sexual enjoyment. Sex was necessary, with marriage the only legitimate setting, for procreation, but *Apollo and Hyacinth* illustrates that sexual pleasure was available, for men at least, in a variety of forms outside of this as well. When Apollo uses his procreative powers to give birth to a new life form, the apotheosis of Hyacinth becomes his own creation. Apollo's own experiences enable him to create life in the form of another experienced adult now prepared for his own procreative destiny. Through pederasty a man propagated his virtues, as it were, in the youth he loved, thereby implanting them by the act of intercourse. Through this pedagogic and sexual act, these two males become fecund beings who have their own reproductive powers. If we track and place Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth* in relation to its Ovidian source, *Metamorphoses,* with its emphasis on the fecundity of nature and pastoralism, Hyacinth's mouth can be understood as the receptacle that receives Apollo's seed and it is from Apollo that a new life of adulthood is born, so in effect their union is a reproductive one of two males creating one being. Their union propagated spiritual offspring such as virtue, experience and knowledge which were all products with greater longevity than biological offspring.Through the education of a young Hyacinth by an older Apollo within the context of homoerotic friendship,

something like sexual reproduction takes place. Through pedagogical guidance, feeling is awakened and further male generations are fertilised and produced. Apollo, as the active older agent also calls upon the like-minded, but now mature, prodigy to imitate him and to also enter into an educative and erotic friendship with beautiful young men. Pederasty opens the prospect of an entire network of homosocial and homoerotic friendships as an education perpetuated from generation to generation. As such, *Apollo and Hyacinth* with its embedded concept of pederasty and its procreative and pedagogic overtones could be prosaically interpreted as nothing less than the homosocial and homoerotic reproductive creation of progeny still to come.

By aligning *Apollo and Hyacinth* with its foundational mythological text, Cellini recalls the manner in which male relationships in antiquity were founded upon such subordination of the younger *eromenos* to the commands of the older *erastes* for the purpose of self-improvement in skill, knowledge and any other form of worldly experience. Furthermore, Cellini invokes the message that as long as the adult protagonist took the sexually dominant role in his relations with boys, his sexuality would have done nothing to distract from his masculinity. In the cultures of classical antiquity and Renaissance Italy, it was presumed that there always would be a difference in age between the two males. Honour was maintained as long as an adolescent boy changed from passive boy to active man once his beard was grown and he had become an adult.[127] This examination of *Apollo and Hyacinth* has considered the erotic and social taxonomies which appear to underlay its execution, and placed the work within the public discourses of contemporary Renaissance life and its creator's personal libidinal predilections.

[127] See Williams, 1999, pp. 166-78 and Cantarella, 1992, pp. 22-7.

Apollo and Cyparissus by Giulio Romano

As this second section illustrates, representations of pederastic relationships could assume various forms during the Renaissance depending on the medium in which they appeared. Here, I focus on Giulio Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* as an image distinctively and influentially grounded in amorous discourse between an older active agent and his adolescent beloved (Fig. 2). This drawing has a contrasting conceptual visualisation and physical execution to Cellini's sculpture of *Apollo and Hyacinth.* It also exemplifies how there were different iconic ambits in the Renaissance - one private, the other public and illustrates the extent to which homoerotically charged imagery assumed different faces for private and public consumption. Whereas the intended audience for Cellini's marble *Apollo and Hyacinth* would most likely have been diverse and fairly open, Romano's drawing would have been distributed to a private circuit which was circumscribed and socially elevated. Congruent with Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth*, Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* remains consistent with the perception of adult males from the higher classes and their position at the apex of a hierarchical social system that privileged patriarchy, age and power in his drawing of intergenerational love between men. Here, I pay particular attention to the manner in which this image draws variously on metaphors of desire, courtship, homoeroticism, and procreation. I also use this case study to elucidate the ways in which the sensuality and corporeal realism of the represented body leads to another social frame; the homoerotic gaze and the social norms which produced it. In addition, I consider the extent to which an image depicting male same-sex erotic impulse, albeit in a different medium, might also correspond with the contemporary stereotypes of masculinity and femininity that took place in the patriarchal society of Renaissance Italy.

Giulio Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* is an example of the way in which homoerotic subject matter held a sensual appeal for many patrons from the sophisticated, cultivated ranks of the humanist elite at this time. However, in order to be considered sufficiently decorous by erudite humanists rather than irredeemably offensive, a veneer of respectability was needed to be conferred through an obvious mythological subject. The classical excursus used in this drawing was particularly important because, by virtue of its subject and medium, there was the potential for it to become publicly viewed as transgressive. Consequently, the visibility and identification of homoerotic elements at play in this drawing is heavily veiled in mythological narrative. As Ruggiero explains: 'to make erotic representations for the elite less troubling and to give them a suitably educated tone, printmakers adopted themes from antiquity which allowed them to represent naked bodies in suggestive poses with a veneer of intellectual respectability. In a pagan context, nudity, eroticism and even to a degree the sexual act itself became less troublesome and somehow more erudite – humanism made even lust an intellectual exercise'.[128] In the context of homoerotic imagery it seems that Ruggiero's observations of these common practices of engendering sex scenes with mythology were regarded as necessity rather than choice.

Closer examination of Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* will enable placement of this image at the intersection of modes of Renaissance thought where myth and sexual desire for other males were considerations that often mapped together in art. In fact, this linking of homoerotic depictions with mythological elements can be traced back to the previous century in Marco Zoppo's *Playing Putti* (c.1450) where two male protagonists with linked arms and accompanying youths stand over a group of cavorting putti (Fig.

[128] G. Ruggiero, 'Hunting for birds in the Italian Renaissance', in S. F. Matthews-Grieco, (ed.), *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, Farnham, 2010, p. 5.

22).[129] The putti are at play but there is an overt reference to anal penetration as one putto inserts an air bellows into the behind of another who bends over. It seems that the two pairs of male protagonists adhere to the required gender and power constructs for male-same sex desire but the inference of their sexual activity has to be gleaned from the actions of the putti who act as the personifications of love.

It is also intriguing to see how the mythological veneer we see in Giulio Romano's drawing appears again in the same artist's fresco for the ceiling of the Camera del Sole e della Luna in Mantua of *Apollo on his Chariot* (1527) - thus demonstrating that even works produced for private pleasure required couching in mythological narratives (Fig. 23). In this particular fresco for the ducal palace, the god's unashamed flaunting of dramatically foreshortened and exposed nude buttocks and genitals brings a profane pseudo-classical tone in what seems to be an unambiguous tailoring of the Apollonian narrative to homoerotic tastes. Even Francesco Salvaiti's *Study of Three Men* (c.1545) which shows a group of males engaged in a clearly physical homoerotic dialogue casts the proponents as classically inspired male nudes with hairstyles recalling the paradigmatic appearance of pagan gods from antiquity (Fig. 24). Interestingly, however, in Parmigianino's *Erotic Scene* (1530) this overlay of classical mythology is remarkably absent despite the fact that a male is depicted grasping another's aroused penis (Fig. 25). I maintain that the inclusion of a woman in this now prudishly censored drawing makes it closer in spirit to *I modi*. It is conceivable that by depicting a woman exposing her vagina, the homoerotic aspect is mitigated to the extent that the artist was able to eschew all pretence of a classical or pagan theme. I would also suggest that the expanded cast of both sexes here made this subject more

[129] For an account of how Putti featured in ancient classical art as winged infants that were believed to have influence over human lives, see C. Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, Chapel Hill and London, 2001.

acceptable because it would have been perceived as orgiastic rather than homoerotic; thus there was no need to assign this work to a recognisable mythological narrative. Another interesting example of the need to deploy mythology for the depiction of homoerotic encounters can be found in Perino del Vaga's treatment of erotic subjects – *Couple Embracing* and *Apollo and Hyacinth* (c.1525-7) (Figs. 26-27). Here, Giulio's fellow apprentice in Raphael's workshop illustrates the two aspects of carnal pleasure – sexual desire between a man and a woman versus same-sex desire between two males. Although neither displays the salacious carnality we see in *I modi* or Giulio's version of *Apollo and Hyacinth*, these are noteworthy exemplars of the variance in attitudes to erotica. In Perino's erotic encounter between a man and a woman the couple remain ambiguous and unidentified. The artist renders this couple devoid of any classical or mythological overlay but yet in the accompanying drawing of male intergenerational love there is the necessity to veil the homoeroticism in the humanistic gloss of the mythological narrative of *Apollo and Hyacinth*. No mythological source can be discerned in the former *pas de deux* but Perino makes sure that he captures the attributes of the Apollonian myth in the latter by including a bow and quiver, as well as the sprouting eponymous flower.

Ovidian Source

Seeming to take the moment when Apollo grants Cyparissus his wish to grieve forever for his beloved stag, and just before his transformation into another life form, Romano depicts Apollo fondly, and perhaps passionately, kissing the adolescent juvenile Cyparissus on the lips whilst fondling his genitals (Fig.2). Being beloved by Apollo would have constituted honorific status for both Hyacinth and Cyparissus, but as we have seen a boy was only supposed to enjoy sexual experiences with other males at a

particular age and was expected to follow precise rules linked with sociability and conviviality. Like the Hyacinth myth which inspired Cellini's sculpture, Romano's drawing is based on Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses,* but the literal reading in this instance has the younger agent transforming into a cypress tree rather than a flowering plant:

> that as he lay there Cyparissus pierced him with a javelin: and although it was quite accidental, when the shocked youth saw his loved stag dying from the cruel wound he could not bear it, and resolved on death. What did not Phoebus say to comfort him? He cautioned him to hold his grief in check, consistent with the cause. But still the lad lamented, and with groans implored the Gods that he might mourn forever. His life force exhausted by long weeping, now his limbs began to take a green tint, and his hair, which overhung his snow-white brow, turned up into a bristling crest; and he became a stiff tree with a slender top and pointed up to the starry heavens. And the God, groaning with sorrow, said; `You shall be mourned sincerely by me, surely as you mourn for others, and forever you shall stand in grief, where others grieve. [130]

As images that could be reproduced and multiplied, printed matter taken from drawings such as *Apollo and Cyparissus* created the possibility for widespread dissemination of illicit subject matter to an expanded audience defined by income, erudition and the privileges of status.[131] The medium of prints acted as a forum for explicit erotica to be consumed privately, and as this proverb by the humanist Sabadino

[130] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X, p. 73.
[131] For the impact of early printmaking on the function, meaning, and viewing of images in this period see D. S. Areford 'The Image in the Viewer's Hands: The Reception of Early Prints in Europe', *Studies in Iconography* 24, West Michigan, 2003, pp. 5-42.

degli Arienti (c.1480) implies, a ready market awaited Marcantonio Raimondi's printed version of Romano's drawing: 'if you want some fun, have sex often with boys'.[132]

Historiography

Romano, unlike Cellini, did not leave an autobiography and there is little extant information about the commission or its patron. Romano's own sexual proclivities are also not demonstrable through written sources. There is scant published literature on this drawing with Saslow commenting only briefly in *Ganymede in the Renaissance*.[133] Bette Talvacchia confers only a few paragraphs to the drawing in *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*. However, Talvacchia's research is a valuable source because it explores the explicit nature of Romano's heterosexual representations of copulation with similar themes, discusses their relationship with classical precedents and offers insights into their reception by Renaissance audiences. Not only does this assist with the chronological contextualisation of sexual representations, but Romano's explicit images of copulation between a man and a woman also provide a platform for addressing how the same artist adopts different visual strategies with varying conceptualising for depicting carnal behaviour between males. I will, therefore, discuss Talvacchia's discourse on Romano's *I modi* images of copulating heterosexuals and consider the relationship between mythological references and amatory scenes in both of these sexual contexts. Another theme I shall explore is how various layered allusions impute a range of meanings on *Apollo and Cyparissus* as an explicitly homoerotic scene immersed in classical sanctioning metaphor and how this drawing could be intended to assert and proclaim far more than licentious carnal intent alone.

[132] Sabadino degli Arienti, 'Le porretane' (1483), cited in G. Basile, *Stories from the Pentamerone*, Rome, 1981, p. 106.
[133] Saslow, 1986, p. 113.

Although documentary evidence to support exact dating of the drawing is beyond recovery, Talvacchia makes a compelling argument that *Apollo and Cyparissus* is stylistically redolent of Romano's earlier work.[134] However, there are important differences between *I modi* and *Apollo and Cyparissus,* which make it erroneous to conflate these works into the same *topos* of salacious erotica. The mythological references which were sufficiently distancing to elude censorship in the homoerotically charged *Apollo and Cyparissus,* as well as Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth,* are absent in *I modi*. There is instead, as Talvacchia notes, lascivious sexual activity that exemplifies an 'intention to gloss the erotic situations with a generic mythological reference rather than to convey precise mythological narrations'.[135] Vasari remains silent on the matter of *I modi* in his biography of Giulio, but roundly condemns the obscenity of both the sonnets and the engravings in his *vita* of Raimondi: 'in which regard, I do not know which is uglier, the spectacle of Giulio's drawings to the eye, or Aretino's words to the ears'.[136]

At first glance, Apollo might appear to be bestowing an open-mouthed kiss on his young companion whilst fondling his genitals. However, a secondary reading can be offered for consideration where the protagonists are following an initiatory model enmeshed with gender hierarchy that closely parallels those encoded in Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth*. That said, whereas Cellini's sculpture of *Apollo and Hyacinth* emphasises the emotional relationship of the two lovers, Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus*, who also dies tragically at the deity's hands, is far more unambiguous about expressing the physical nature of their union. Yet, it is interesting to note how Romano

[134] Talvacchia, 1999, pp. 128-30.
[135] Talvacchia, 1999, p. 134.
136 G.Vasari, *Vita di Marcantonio Bolognese, e d'altri intagliatori di stampe, primo volume della terza parte delle vite de' piu eccelenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, cited in Talvacchia, 1999, p. 7.

overtly depicts both penetrative vaginal and anal intercourse in *I modi*, but exercises far more restraint for his homoerotic scene of *Apollo and Cyparissus*. Similarly, Aretino's accompanying sonnets (*I sonetti lussuriosi*) also elucidate how contemporary attitudes to heterosexual sex, even if the act technically qualifies as 'sodomy', were far less circumspect when addressing a 'normative' coupling:

Sonnet 8

> It may very well be bollocks, since it is in my power to screw you now, to have put my cock in your pussy although there is no dearth of available ass. May my genealogy end with me, since I want to do you very often in your rear; for the sphere and the slit are as different as rainwater from wine.
>
> Fuck me and do with me what you will both in my pussy and my behind; it matters little to me where you go about your business. Because I, for my part, am aflame in both places; and all of the pizzles of mules, asses, and oxen would not diminish my lust even a little. Then you would be a no-count fellow to do it to me in my snatch, in accordance with normal ways. If I were a man, I wouldn't want pussy. [137]

The private viewing conditions of explicit printed erotica depicting heterosexual copulation such as Romano's *I modi* seem to call for a very limited veneer of mythological precedent in narrative and visual form. However, the same artist's rendering of *Apollo and Cyparissus* demonstrates that a need existed for sanctioning classical precedent when dealing with homoerotic themes. The mythological narrative performs a much more precise role in the form, meaning and composition of Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus.* Whilst Talvacchia briefly mentions Romano's drawing in her

[137] *I sonetti lussuriosi di Pietro Aretino*, quoted in Talvacchia, 1999, p. 209.

publication, there is no acknowledgement of the different standards of decorum Romano applied to *I modi* and *Apollo and Cyparissus*. Rather than recognising Romano's indebtedness to the Ovidian homoerotic mythological narrative for this depiction of pederastic love between Apollo and his younger beloved, she reads *Apollo and Cyparissus* as:

> minimising the implied narrative content of mythological reference…present[ing] difficulties in the identification of the god's partner, since no easily readable attributes nor highly specific narrative details appear... Indicative of the concept behind the composition: the fundamental subject is erotic representation, not the narration of a mythological story. The visual signs needed to provide the cover of mythological allusion are kept to a minimum. [138]

In its present location at the Stockholm National Museum, the drawing has as its caption *Apollo and Hyacinth or Cyparissus?* The fact that the image depicts the god with either one of his youthful male lovers is not called into question in published commentary and, aside from Talvacchia, there has been little attention paid to the iconographical evidence contained within the scene itself.[139] Talvacchia suggests that he subject's ambiguity might indeed be deliberately subordinated to the primary purpose of depicting Apollo with a young male lover.[140] However, my premise for identification of this drawing as *Apollo and Cyparissus* rather than *Apollo and Hyacinth* is built upon Romano's inclusion of the archer's bow grasped in the youth's left hand, which can be read as a direct allusion to the fatal weapon that felled the boy's cherished stag and

[138] Talvacchia, 1999, pp. 128-31.
[139] Romano's drawing was included in the 2009 exhibition 'Art and Love in Renaissance Italy' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The brief description in the exhibition catalogue also touches on the matter of its ambiguous identification but offers no definitive conclusion, see L. Wolk-Smith, 'Profane Love' in A. Bayer, (ed.), *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London, 2009, p.190.
[140] Talvacchia, 1999, p. 269, n.7.

thereafter rendered him so grief-stricken that Apollo conducted his metamorphosis into a tree (Fig.2). Textual concordance is also maintained in the manner Romano's pastoral landscape plays host to this scene of pederastic union. Secondly, the tree is given compositional centrality in the drawing, whereas there is no floral referent to suggest any alternative appellation as Hyacinth. Furthermore, the adolescent's identity as Cyparissus is further supported by this very tree. The sap that seeps from its bark alludes to Cyparissus' tears that will fall for ever in memory of the loss of his beloved stag. Also, as a hard perennial wood impervious to rot, cypress was often used as a symbol of longevity by sculptors and has been planted in cemeteries since antiquity when this durable and evergreen tree was perceived to be the antithesis of death and symbolic of eternal life.[141]

In a way that is analogous to the Ovidian story, Romano depicts the younger Cyparissus holding in his left hand the archer's bow which fatally wounded his beloved stag. Apollo's gift of a stag for the adolescent Cyparissus can be understood allegorically as his recognition that his young lover is approaching maturity and ready for adulthood. Hunting is a common metaphor for sexual prowess throughout history and the symbolic significance of shooting a bow and arrow has resonance with ejaculation and vital sexual energy.[142] The bow and arrow were both penetrative and ejaculatory, providing a sexual symbolism of an adolescent's post-puberty state.[143] Indeed, Boswell adduces that the prominence of the hunt in homoerotic poetry and Italian chivalric literature of the Middle Ages is due to its association of leisure

[141] The symbolic function of the cypress tree as a symbol of bodily death and spiritual immortality has its roots in the fact that urns for containing the ashes of ancient Greeks were made from this wood. http://www.ehow.com/about_6469401_meaning-behind-cypress-trees.html.
[142] For a detailed account of phallic symbolism and the sexual association of weaponry see P. Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 112-22.
[143] Also see M. Friedman, 'The Falcon and the Hunt: Symbolic Love Imagery in Medieval and Renaissance art' in M. Lazar and N. J. Lacy, (eds.), *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages*, Fairfax VA, 1989, pp. 157-75.

activities such as hunting with same-sex desire.[144] Furthermore, not only is forbidden carnal love all powerful, it can be, like the bow, perilous and has the capacity to inflict pain. As Patricia Simons notes: 'masculine quivers hold profuse, penetrating objects that fluidly arc through the air, delivered by a bow that was more like the penis in function'. [145] The manner in which Cyparissus is holding Apollo's bow erect by its hilt has suggestive homoerotic overtones and phallic connotations. Homoerotic connotations in association with a bow appear again in the early faithful copy by Eugenio Cajés of Parmigianino's *Cupid Carving his Bow* (1535) (Fig. 28). In this painting Cupid presents his ample buttocks provocatively to the viewer as he carves his bow in an erotic metaphor over two cherubs struggling with the conundrum of succumbing or resisting their temptation to touch the god's flesh.[146] Indeed, there are recorded rites of passage associated with many cultures where a juvenile becomes a man when he is deemed mature enough to join his peers on hunting exploits, with the slaughter of a large animal for the first time seen as part of a ritual associated with becoming ready for adulthood.[147] This killing of the stag in the Cyparissus legend preserves an archaic element missing from the Hyacinth myth with the killing of a large wild animal permitting Cyparissus to pass into the rank of adulthood after his mystical death. Now that he has successfully passed one of the initiation rites associated with a fundamental transformation in the manifestation of male power by killing such a large beast, Cyparissus is finally worthy of being considered an adult male citizen. If Romano's drawing is read as portraying the aftermath of the stag's demise and at the very moment that Apollo agrees to turn Cyparissus into the aforementioned cypress tree so that he can

[144] J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, Chicago, 1980, p. 253.
[145] Simons, 2011, p. 121.
[146] The homoerotic allure of this work is discussed by Saslow, 1986, pp. 129-31 and Wind, 1976, p. 95, n.10.
[147] For an account of cultural expressions and rituals of coming of age, see A. Schlegal and H. Barry III, *Adolescence: An anthropological inquiry*, New York, 1990.

grieve forever, as told in Ovid's poem, then the image may be read as encapsulating a tender kiss of farewell as well as an explicit sexual activity.

There is a special resonance between the written account of *Apollo and Cyparissus* and Romano's visual rendition. When Talvacchia opines that there are 'difficulties in the identification of the god's partner, since no easily readable attributes nor highly specific narrative details appear' in Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus*, she does not appear to recognise the importance of the bow or the tree's association with the Ovidian myth from which it was sourced.[148] The classicising aura in the homoerotic drawing is more evident in comparison to the more naturalised rendering of the heterosexual *I modi*, but Talvacchia posits 'the youth's identity is unclear partly because there is no emphasis on the particular mythological narrative'.[149] I contend that male love and sexual pleasure pervade the drawing to such an extent that Talvacchia is remiss to attempt to 'straighten out' the image by conflating its themes with those of *I modi*. Moreover, the image's carnality veils a multiplicity of nuances which we should aspire to comprehend because they address issues of identity, gender and sexuality in a way that is absent from his heterosexually biased erotic representations of couples copulating.

Visualising and Voyeurism

One of the most extraordinary features of Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* must surely be his inclusion of a female voyeur within his composition where the main protagonists are men behaving in accordance within codified gender expectations for masculinity (Fig. 29). However, it is my contention that her role becomes considerably less

[148] Talvacchia, 1999, p. 130.
[149] Talvacchia, 1999, p. 269.

ambiguous if we return to this study's main premise that neither of Apollo's young beloveds transform into botanical forms on a literal level but instead both become procreative beings following their pedagogical and formative post-puberty experiences under Apollo's tutelage. In Romano's depiction of *Apollo and Cyparissus*, it could be suggested that the female figure who observes their libidinous union serves to reiterate the expectation that the juvenile Cyparissus would soon be assuming the active role of lover and husband. Renaissance societies, just as the Greeks beforehand, might have considered themselves an enlightened race but they did not include women in that definition. Similarly, Romano reiterates the notion that if one were seeking a relationship among equals one must seek another enlightened male by marginalising the female role to that of voyeur rather than protagonist in his composition. Romano preserves the intimacy of Apollo's union with his beloved Cyparissus by segregating the female voyeur from the activity. Further to that, the viewer is also excluded by Romano since neither of the lovers offer eye contact with the spectator. Through this absence of engagement with anyone else except themselves, Romano seems to encourage the viewer to feel that they also have crept up upon their moment of private tenderness and thereby consigns them to the role of voyeur also.[150]

It is not difficult to envisage that Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* is very much about looking and the part it plays in sexual desire. Therefore, the presence of the woman voyeur invites further thought in relation to how spectatorship in the context of the gendered ramifications of looking might be embedded within the image. Throughout the history of artistic production, images of women have mostly been presented in a manner that focuses upon their status as sexual beings or maternal figures. The power of

[150] For the relationship between vision and sex, see E. Campbell and R. Mills (eds.), *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*, Basingstoke and New York, 2004.

the male gaze and the objectification of women as instruments for visual pleasure have been intertwined with the social roles and sexual stereotypes of men and women.[151] In the Renaissance, the commerce of art was almost the exclusive domain of men since most collectors as well as the primary viewing audience were male. However, I maintain that Romano appears to fracture certain general paradigms of visual engagement designed to crystallise patriarchal structures of looking where women are transferred into chattel by offering a more sophisticated critical purchase on the sexual politics of viewing in this homoerotic scene.

On the one hand, in *Apollo and Cyparissus* Romano seemingly underscores these gendered relations of power both compositionally and thematically in a conventional manner where, as John Berger notes, 'men act, women appear'.[152] The boy attracts a male active and homoerotic gaze, thereby becoming a rendition of a passive adolescent object of desire. Meanwhile, Romano's Apollo carries an expression of a particular mode of power - one that can be associated with sovereignty and this was surely an identity to which contemporary viewers who were mainly men entirely assured of their own dominance would choose to relate. A male spectator's gaze transports him into the role of Apollo as the active and powerful agent who captures the essence of virile masculine patriarchy. However, in this case it is not the loosely draped formless woman who is the object of the male spectator's pleasure but the nude precocious Cyparissus with genitals tantalisingly obscured from view that is designed to redirect the active desiring eyes of the viewer. *Apollo and Cyparissus* elicits a desirous visuality, but it can be argued that the woman who is observed watching the activity stands in for the viewer

[151] M. Sturken and L. Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: an Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford, 2001, pp. 71-108. For a perceptive study of the gaze in visual culture see P. Simons, 'Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture', *History Workshop*, No. 25 (Spring, 1988), pp. 4-30.
[152] J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, New York and London, 2001, p. 47.

because he is perhaps consigned to sharing her role as a mere voyeur as if also distanced from the action and disempowered by exclusion. A gendered and paradigmatically masculine gaze with fleshly modes of looking by virtue of its corporeality is unusually absent here because the woman is uninterested in the viewer's gaze, and her own gaze demonstrates that our looking is the least of her concerns.

The viewer is drawn to the soft vivacious body of the youth which, although not idealised, remains an object of desire. The erotic tangency of Cyparissus' flesh is all the more alluring because it will soon be the hard, unyielding bark of the cypress. However, the presence of the female figure positions the work within a discourse on the ethical problems of desire because just as the viewer's gaze is directed at Cyparissus, so too is that of the woman voyeur. Romano situates the epicene boy above the viewer as if taunting him with his passive sexuality. His sexually alert body, so teasingly attractive and carefully positioned, was undoubtedly intended to appeal to contemporary homoerotic taste. Romano depicts something going on for the viewer, but at the same time Cyparissus is imagined as physically out of reach. It can be suggested that the male viewer is forcibly reminded of his condition reduced to the level of a sensual voyeur and left to reflect on his own erotic responses as Apollo achieves by proxy an act from which he himself is debarred in physical reality. Because he is not cast in the role of participant, the desiring viewer is held at a distance. In fact, it is the female voyeur who will 'act out' the viewer's fantasy in due course. As the narrating agent, this woman is the focaliser in and of the scene. There is a critical economy of looking in which no figure but that of the woman voyeur actually sees. Ultimately, she is the one who will benefit from the moments when the youth was once a companion who learned with and from his older lover how to enjoy, as well as later teach, the pleasures of life in the correct way with the correct moderation. Her gaze materialises what we see and offers

the only model within the scene for the viewer's own act of looking. Thus, movement of the gaze from practice to representation provides a mode of spectatorship where the impact that looking plays is transferable between the abstract space of Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus*'s representational structure and the actual space of the viewer through his desiring gaze. The beholder is made to calibrate his gaze with that of the woman, so that not only does she correspond to both the role of the spectator immersed within the drawing and that of the audience, but she mirrors his voyeuristic sense of fascination with her own eroticised gaze. Moreover, through her scandalous appropriation of masculine privilege, the woman invokes a sense of self-reflection by allowing the viewer to see themselves as others might well have seen them, as mere spectators constrained by impotent desire to the role of voyeur also.

In one sense, the female conforms to expected gender roles by silently observing male interaction without intervention in a manner that would have mirrored expected behavioural comportment from an obedient prospective wife.[153] Romano's female figure could thus be said to be a metaphor alluding to the actual distance of Renaissance women from codes of male behaviour. But in another, her voyeurism brings her some degree of empowerment because she can be identified with the predominantly male audience in a way that threatens the power of gazing. Showing little concern for the fact that she should not be seen looking, the woman seems to have forgotten her modesty as she emerges from behind the foliage. She also does not appear to notice that we are looking at her or them because she has no averted eyes or interaction with viewer. Instead, she usurps the traditions of male spectatorship because she is not the object of visual pleasure nor does her voyeurism engage the attention of Apollo or Cyparissus.

[153] For an account of Renaissance womanhood and contemporary expectations for feminine decorum, see G. Servadio, *Renaissance Woman*, London and New York, 2005, pp. 1-21.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy how the motif of a fascinated voyeuristic male onlooker observing a scene of carnality is later repeated in Romano's fresco of *Jupiter and Olympias*, c.1528, for the Camera de Psyche in Mantua's Palazzo de Te (Fig. 30). In this rendition of a legend by the Greek chronicler Plutarch (c.46–120 AD) where Jupiter seduces the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great's mother Olympias, Giulio Romano depicts the moment when her husband Phillip is blinded by the god for witnessing the act: 'Philip after this portent sent Chairon of Megalopolis to Delphi, to consult the god there, and that he delivered an oracular response bidding him sacrifice to Zeus Ammon, and to pay especial reverence to that god: warning him, moreover, that he would someday lose the sight of that eye with which, through the chink of the half-opened door, he had seen the god consorting with his wife in the form of a serpent'.[154] A watching woman is also included in the same artist's painting of *The Lovers* (1525), where Zeus' sexual encounter with Alcmene is observed by a maidservant from behind a half-open door (Fig. 31). The manner in which these works share a common theme with the drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus*, where divinities are been observed by a third party as they perform sexual acts with mortals, is perhaps an indication of contemporary taste for the pleasure of looking in a sexual context. Nevertheless, whereas the female voyeur in that drawing is placed within the scene as a prominent protagonist, the partially concealed observers in the background of both *Jupiter and Olympias* and *The Lovers* seem to be posed as intruders and thus display a considerably lesser level of connection between themselves and the respective pairs of embracing couples.

Giulio's repertoire of coded visual motifs in the *Apollo and Cyparissus* drawing includes the manner in which this woman voyeur inserts a finger in her own mouth (Fig.

[154]John Langhorne and William Langhorne, (eds.), *Plutarch's Lives*, Cincinnati, 1874, p. 437.

29). This lewd gesture with the forefinger carries an analogous meaning that expounds on the sexual theme of the narrative. The didactic logic of look and learn leaps out at the viewer here whilst heightening the titillating aspect of the illicit counter she witnesses as the literal, and implied audience. In ancient Greece, the finger in mouth gesture was used in a sexually derogatory manner and called the *katapygon* referring to 'a male who submits to anal penetration'.[155] I would argue that the presence of the female voyeur seems far more nuanced than a gesture of puzzlement or dismay and is more likely to be read as the woman's anticipation of her forthcoming role as the administrator of pleasure for her soon to be adult and marriageable suitor.

The Allegory of Awaiting Adulthood

If the tree placed centrally in the composition is perceived as embodying the symbolic metamorphosis of Cyparissus into adulthood, then just as the intimate embrace of the two male paramours signifies his adolescent passive exploits to its left, when transformation is complete, he will step into the manly sphere of active adulthood that awaits him on the other side. Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* crystallises, but hardly resolves, the dilemma of a man who loves a youth who may be attracted to a woman or who, at least, is expected to marry and reproduce. Romano's positioning of the tree instantiates patriarchal structures of power with clear separation of sexual pleasure from sexual duty. The way that the artist balances norm against transgression with the inclusion of both male and female erotics of viewing positioned apart in the composition underscores how sexual experiences between males in the Renaissance were only tolerated if they were successive and cyclical and not seen as an alternative to

[155] D. Halperin and J. Winkler, *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, Princeton, 1992, p. 186; B. Cohen, *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the construction of the other in Greek art*, Boston, 2000, p. 186.

marriage and producing a family. Romano encodes the image with patriarchal power and categories of masculine virtue in the manner he juxtaposes the naked, idealised beauty of Cyparissus engaged in a sexually suggestive coupling with his paramour Apollo against the formless drapery that envelops the isolated clothed female figure. In accordance with prescribed contemporary gender roles this woman is, and will remain, ostracized from both the physical and spiritual facets of male relationships, regardless of their carnal intent.

Ovid's Apollo is described as 'that god who strings the lyre and the bow' in the myth of Cyparissus.[156] This motif together with the prominence of the tree that provides the backdrop seems intended as a further reference to the Cyparissus story. Here, however, it is not a lyre but a large bowed stringed musical instrument that is positioned precariously leaning against the rock. The shape of this instrument is strongly suggestive of feminine characteristics but, significantly, it is presently left neglected by the juvenile Cyparissus. Romano renders his female devoid of luscious, glorious fleshiness in a manner which eschews the objectifying logic of male gazing and female passivity, but includes instead an instrument which replicates the graceful curves of an idealised womanly form (Fig. 32).[157] The erotic connotations of musical instruments and musical performance, as well as their association with sexual acts, finds expression in several Italian poems and songs from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[158] Pietro Aretino, who also composed poems to accompany the contemporaneous *I modi*, stated that 'as all women know, music, songs and letters are the key to unlock the gates of

[156] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 10, 107-8.
[157] This musical instrument resembling a cello is likely to be bass *viol da gamba* which first appeared in the early Renaissance. For an account of the history and use of this instrument, see I. Woodfield and H. Brown (eds.), *The Early History of the Viol*, Cambridge, 1984.
[158] For the erotic power of music, see F. Dennis, 'Unlocking the gates of chastity: music and the erotic in the domestic sphere in fifteenth and sixteen-century Italy' in S. F. Matthews-Grieco, (ed.), *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, Farnham, 2010, pp. 223-45.

chastity'.[159] Tactile engagement with stringed instruments was thought to enhance the sense of eroticism and the transgressive aspect of lust during this period.[160] Erotic allusion to the commonality between musical and sexual virtuosity, emphasising how in both cases skilful execution reaped rich rewards appears in the sixteenth-century carnival song '*Canzo di lanzi sonatori di rubechine*' which exploits the double meaning of playing a stringed instrument with a bow: 'To make clear and beautiful sounds / when the strings are slack / touch these pegs / which are placed inside here; / when you have tuned it well / it rewards you with a sweet little voice / When it is well tuned/ take this bow in hand; / move it vigorously up and down / to a dextrous finger and a clear touch; / whoever puts effort and intelligence into it / feels greater sweetness in the end.'[161]

In the case of Romano's abandoned stringed instrument, the male protagonists could be read as a euphemism for neglecting the act of touching, cradling, handling, playing, and caressing the female body in order to emit the desired sounds. In addition, the instrument's neck terminates with a carving of a serpent's head in a way that could be understood as a symbolic allusion to female temptation (Fig. 33).[162] This reference to Eve's temptation of Adam in the Garden of Eden finds a parallel in the pastoral setting of *Apollo and Cyparissus* and is emblematic of a potential threat to masculine virtue by succumbing to female sexual desire. Romano seems to be suggesting that the woman, playing the part of temptress, could prematurely distract their attention away from the serious business of pederastic pedagogy. The occurrence of a woman voyeur in the

[159] P. Aretino, *The Letters of Pietro Aretino*, cited in Matthews-Grieco, 2010, p. 223.
[160] Matthews-Grieco, 2010, p. 229.
[161] T.J. McGee and S. Mittler, 'Information on Instruments in Florentine Carnival Songs', *Early Music*, 10, 1982, p. 458, quoted in Matthews-Grieco, 2010, p. 227, n. 28.
[162] It was common for the peg-box of these large stringed instruments to be decorated with heads or scrolls but here this part of the viol has the appearance of a snake.

same pictorial field forewarns that to cede phallic pleasure to a woman threatens socio-political status since domination by desire - particularly sexual desire for women - was considered as undermining the self-control so central to the conception of masculine virtue.[163] As if to emphasise that passivity was only acceptable at a certain stage in a man's life, the phallic symbolism of the temporarily abandoned bow that Romano prominently places in the centre foreground evokes a certain reassurance that once metamorphosis into adulthood as an active procreative being is complete, Cyparissus will return his attention to this more 'natural' form in order to fulfil his own patriarchal and pedagogical obligations. Despite its strong homoerotic overtones, within Romano's drawing a coherent, if complex, picture emerges where it seems that once his metamorphosis is complete, Cyparissus, in line with all juveniles expected to take up their place as erstwhile citizens, will soon marry and sire offspring as a civic and familial duty.

The Penis and its Meaning

What has been said so far indicates that visual emphasis is significant and omnipresent in *Apollo and Cyparissus.* Romano draws the viewer's attention to Cyparissus' penis with Apollo's hand-to-genital gesture in a way that could be perceived as a lewd act concerned with erotic phallic pleasuring (Fig. 34). But if the imminent death of Cyparissus is understood as mystical, symbolic and initiatory, then Romano's pedagogic and formative Apollo could in fact be also gesturing to his initiate's developing penis in a manner that indicates how Cyparissus as a young male is himself budding and maturing into an active agent with sexual capabilities of his own. The touching, protection or presentation of male genitalia is far from the exclusive preserve

[163] Concerns about the debilitating expenditure of semen and the perceived need for retaining sexual self-control are discussed by Simons, 2011, pp. 163-9.

of representations of pagan subject matter. As Leo Steinberg observed, late medieval and Renaissance artists made Christ's genitalia the focal point of their religious depictions because His penis emphasized his sexuality which in turn symbolized his humanity.[164]According to Steinberg, the Infant's genitals are displayed in order to demonstrate his humanity by means of his sex. Steinberg also claims that the blood shed in Christ's circumcision adumbrates that of the Crucifixion. Thereby, Christ's manhood proves his humanity and is fundamental to understanding the mystery of the incarnation and its identification with humankind's redemption: 'If the godhead incarnates itself to suffer a human fate, it takes on the condition of being both deathbound and sexed. The mortality it assumes is correlative with sexuality, since it is by procreation that the race, though consigned to death individually, endures collectively to fulfill the redemptive plan. Therefore, to profess that God once embodied himself in a human nature is to confess that the eternal, there and then, become mortal and sexual. That understood, the evidence of Christ's sexual member serves as the pledge of God's humanation'. [165]

Romano's drawing presents an emphatic depiction of eroticism between men, but if one sets aside the rhetoric of carnality in *Apollo and Cyparissus* and adopts the notion that the display of Christ's genitals signifies the sexual aspect of His humanity, then Romano's profane image of Apollo gesturing to Cyparissus' penis as a parallel signifier of the sexual aspect of his pending adulthood could also have a less licentious facet than might at first be assumed. As Steinberg observes, the gesture appears to be a common motif with the capacity to communicate a variety of allegorical messages in devotional imagery. Exemplars for Mary's similarly demonstrative emphasis of Christ's genitals

[164] L. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Second Edition, Revised and Expanded), Chicago, 1986. Steinberg interprets this motif in the context of Renaissance theology when devotion to the Holy foreskin and the Feast of Circumcision were important tenets of Christian faith.
[165] Steinberg, 1986, p. 15.

are Giovanni Cariani's *Madonna and Child with Donor* (1520) and Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Magi* (1487) (Figs. 35- 36). The union of mortality and fecundity as defining terms of the human condition is an allegorical metaphor that finds commonality in both sacred and profane depictions. Whether the subject matter has pagan or theological origin, the gesture of presenting the younger agent's penis can be read as signifying the creation of a sexually defined man. Therefore, Apollo could be understood as presenting Cyparissus's genitalia as evidence of his impending manhood in a similar manner to Mary's emphasis of Christ's own manhood in devotional paintings. Whereas Cyparissus's penile development can be interpreted as affirming his readiness to ascend to an eternal life, Christ's penis testifies to God's descent into earthly life as the incarnated flesh and blood of humanity. Whereas Cyparissus surrenders his life as mortal and sexual to become eternal, the incarnate Christ surrenders eternity to become mortal and sexual.

Such ambiguities regarding the visibility and identification of certain homoerotic elements at play in *Apollo and Cyparissus* tally closely to the format adopted for surviving artefacts from classical antiquity, where scenes of male love were rather restrained and understated with anal penetration not widely depicted; presumably because this act was deemed demeaning to the recipient.[166] Instead, in Greek attic pottery there is a conscious idealization where the *erastĕs* is more commonly depicted fondling or offering gifts to his *erõmenos.* The most explicit sexual congress depicted is intercrural intercourse, where the adult's penis is rubbed between the youth's thighs (Fig. 37). In Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* the older partner would have adopted the role of inserter but, unlike most of the *I modi*, there is no need to expose the actual act of phallic penetration because the implication of its presence alone is

[166] E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, New Haven and London, 2002, pp. 17-27.

sufficient to reiterate its function as an index of hierarchical and sociopolitical empowerment (Figs. 2 & 8-11). Similarly, Romano does not depict the younger agent as a passive 'victim' of penetration because that would evoke his status as being parallel to the women in *I modi* and thus nothing more than an instrumental foil to the adult males in their scenes. Seeming to visually assert the need to preserve Cyparissus' honour now that he is at the cusp of manhood, Romano separates the lovers with Apollo's cloak draped between the adult's groin and the now transforming the youth's buttocks. In this manner, Romano makes similar implicit claims about the importance of sexual and social roles in the period to those Rocke makes from his research of the judicial archives: 'the sexual passivity of grown man evoked such derisive or alarmed reactions among informers and encouraged such forceful disciplining by the authorities not only because it was inappropriate behaviour for adult men, in contrast to boys, but because it was considered unacceptable masculine behaviour that challenged and threatened to defame the virility not only of the offender himself but of the entire male community'.[167] *Apollo and Cyparissus* differs from *I modi* because of the ways in which it illustrates how honourable and accepted sexual practices for men were defined by status and age and played out according to rules that assured neither party was degraded or open to accusations of licentiousness. Whereas, to be penetrated by a richer and older lover was acceptable since it was customary to receive from such men, similarly, it was inconceivable to be penetrated by a younger and poorer man because it was the custom to give to these persons. With Romano's implied rather than explicit carnality, and in contrast to the lewd modes of sexual congress depicted in *I modi*, the younger agent in this homoerotically charged image of *Apollo and Cyparissus* is spared the effeminising

[167] Milner, S. J., (ed.), *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Premodern Italy*, Minneapolis, 2005, p. 64.

humiliation of actual penetration and therefore his future status as a mature citizen ready to take his place in a hierarchical culture with stringent power dynamics is preserved from compromise.

Another mode of signification which invites our consideration is the manner in which Romano's drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* represents the younger protagonist's thigh straddling that of his divine lover (Fig. 38). This 'slung-leg motif' is used by Romano to imply rather than depict actual copulation, which together with the tender kiss Apollo grants his paramour Cyparissus evokes the notion that this is a passionate and affectionate union. This is a considerably more circumspect evocation of carnal intent than is depicted in the more explicit and lewd *I modi* where the same artist makes the act of penetration and frank display of both the female vagina and the male erect penis the focal point of his work (Fig. 9). For the homoerotically themed *Apollo and Cyparissus* Romano seems far more reticent about displaying the adult agent's genitalia even in a flaccid state. This apparent reluctance to depict the more profane physical aspects of sexual congress between males can be read as yet another indication that homoerotic depictions were perceived to require greater improvisation with stronger bonds to the antique precedent. Unlike *I modi*, where, as Talvacchia observes, there seems to be an 'intention to gloss the erotic situations with a generic mythological reference rather than to convey precise mythological narrations', when rendering erotic representations of relationships between males, there appears to be a recognised remit which requires the couching of depictions of carnal activity between males in legitimizing mythic reference.[168]

[168] Talvacchia, 1999, p. 134.

The erotic tenor of the slung leg as a direct sexual metaphor became increasingly recognised in Italy during the Renaissance as a token for marital or sexual union, sexual aggression or compliance.[169] The leg thrown across as if claiming or embracing with sexual possessiveness, appears as a motif unequivocal in its erotic association with conjugal sexual union in Vincenzo De Rossi's *Paris and Helen* (1545), executed for Cosimo I de Medici's Boboli Gardens (Figs. 39-40). Giulio Romano's master Raphael also deploys the same slung leg motif as a gesture of male appropriation in his fresco of *Isaac and Rebecca Spied upon by Abimelech* (1518-19), for the ceiling vault of the loggia in the Vatican's papal palace, thereby illustrating that the motif was not the exclusive province of mythological representations (Figs. 41-43). As we have seen, any possible congruence between *Apollo and Cyparissus* and the lewd libertinism of *I modi* is tenuously held together by an erotic thread.

There seems to be greater commonality between *Apollo and Cyparissus* and Raphael's biblical scene where two lovers share an intimate embrace couched in symbolism of their carnal union whilst a third party voyeuristically bears witness (Fig.42). Giulio Romano is recorded as having worked on these Vatican frescoes while apprenticed to Raphael. Raphael's erotic but heterosexually charged fresco may well have provided the inspiration for his student's homoerotically charged design, also featuring the 'slung leg' motif and a voyeur. Just as Raphael deploys the slung-leg motif to veil his depiction of eroticism with the Old Testament account of Isaac in intimate congress with his much younger wife Rebecca, his protégé Giulio ensconces his own homoerotically charged scene of love between an older Apollo and his young amour in mythological narrative. Nevertheless, Romano's own *Madonna and Child* (1522-23),

[169] L. Steinberg, 'Michelangelo's Florentine Pietà: The Missing Leg', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Dec., 1968, p. 343-53.

demonstrates that the Renaissance also witnessed the emergence in popularity of this metaphoric slung leg idiom in association with Christian devotional art (Fig. 44). The image of Christ bestriding the Virgin's thigh, in this instance, has a sacred connotation, however, since it can be read as the consummation of Christ the bridegroom to Mary as the Church. The context for the union of Christ with the Virgin finds theological affirmation in the writings of St. Gregory the Great (540-604): 'it can be said frankly and safely, that when in the mystery of the Incarnation the Father celebrated the wedding of his royal son, he gave him the Holy Church as his companion. The womb of the Virgin Mother was the nuptial couch of his bridegroom.' [170]

Steinberg argues convincingly that during the almost eight years that passed whilst Michelangelo was executing his Florentine *Pietà* (1547 -53) for his own tomb, the growing popularity of this gesture of the 'slung-leg' to denote libidinous activity by his contemporaries was the catalyst for him taking a hammer to Christ's left leg (Fig. 45).[171] Michelangelo may well have originally conceived this portent of nuptial symbolism as Christ's mystic espousal of Mary. However, the aforementioned examples of its use in a sexually explicit context, particularly in the *topos* of homoeroticism, lends support to Steinberg's theory that 'the outright carnality of the symbolic slung leg', may have provoked outrage which when combined with the master's notoriously irascible temper resulted in a fit of destructive rage.[172]

Conclusion

[170] De Lubac, 'Splendour', 209, from St. Gregory, *Hom xxxviii in Evangelia,* cited in Steinberg, 1968, p. 345.
[171] The sculptural group includes Christ supported by the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus - whose face is believed to be a self-portrait of the artist. After destroying the leg Michelangelo gave the work to his servant Antonio who sold it for reconstruction. See Vasari-Milanese, pp. 242-81.
[172] Steinberg, 1968, pp. 343-53.

Part of the strength of perspectives such as Steinberg's, and some of the other aforementioned scholars, is the way they can provide useful co-ordinates for looking more generally at the complex blend of conscious and unconscious frameworks that might be at play within *Apollo and Cyparissus* and *Apollo and Hyacinth*. Generally speaking, however, discourse on the Italian Renaissance has been less than alert to the connection between the predication of masculinity in the visual field of male same-sex erotic behaviour and the subject has often been readily overlooked by those who prefer to study the more traditional and canonical aspects of art and society. But, as we have explored, relationships between adults and juveniles were not necessarily purely or exclusively sexual even if they were erotic. By adopting a more comprehensive approach to the subject of pederasty in the visual domain of the Italian Renaissance and situating these case studies within the historical and sexual specificity of the past, this chapter has reconstructed a variety of factors that might have brought *Apollo and Hyacinth* and *Apollo and Cyparissus* into being. I have argued that the manner in which these images bear directly on the matter of codified expectations for manly sexual, social and cultural deportment places them in close correlation with Rocke's own conclusion that 'intimately related to such concerns about demarcating biological and social stages in life was an equally strong preoccupation about clarifying and reinforcing gender boundaries'.[173] It is within this sociological context of age-asymmetrical, cyclical and temporary sexual behaviour that these images ought to be understood. Furthermore, as powerful contemporary signifiers of the masculine order, *Apollo and Hyacinth* and *Apollo and Cyparissus* can be read as metaphors in the visual rhetoric of masculine power. As such, they help to constitute a central artistic corpus of

[173] Milner, 2005, p. 64.

homoerotic mythology which can provide a particularly rich site for the study of gender performance in the context of male same-sex erotic behaviour.

CHAPTER TWO

The 'Agony and the Ecstasy' of Michelangelo's Mythological Drawings for Tommaso de' Cavalieri.

Introduction

In contrast to Cellini's and Romano's uninhibited approach to the expression of homoeroticism in their respective tropes, this chapter interrogates Michelangelo's depiction of mythic narratives also sourced from the same Ovidian poem *Metamorphoses.* New perspectives will be tendered concerning the social, personal, sexual, religious and moralising context of three highly finished presentation drawings: *The Rape of Ganymede* (1532), *The Punishment of Tityus* (1532) and *The Fall of Phaeton* (1533) which Michelangelo presented to his adored but much younger friend and, perhaps, lover Tommaso de' Cavalieri (Figs. 46-48). Attention will be paid to the intricate nuances and sophisticated pictorial vocabulary used by Michelangelo in this corpus of drawings conceived for Tommaso during the first two years of their long friendship. However, my goal is not to resolve the matter of whether the love shared by the couple was in fact carnally consummated, since I do not believe it is possible to do so without further empirical evidence, but to pay closer attention to the rhetoric of the drawings, and their accompanying letters and poems.

Michelangelo's artistic and literary corpus has been studied in exhaustive detail, and has attracted a myriad of different critical responses, therefore the body of existing literature relating to his work and the debates they have engendered is exceedingly

weighty.[174] However, scholars have been less than alert to the interconnectedness of poetry, art, desire and the social and sexual horizons against which Michelangelo himself moved in Renaissance Italy. As a result, the conceptual frameworks which may have imbued erotic and moral meaning upon these presentation drawings have been largely neglected or censored in the existing mainstream for published documentation on Michelangelo's graphic output. Several questions invite fresh consideration concerning the autobiographical complexion of these drawings as the visual expression of the conflict that existed within Michelangelo between duty and desire, imagination and reason, desire and torment. Yet, to date, scholarship has in large part chosen to neglect the context in which Michelangelo's homoerotic desires and the fear of realising them might be encoded in his art. Whilst *Ganymede* has been the focus of scholarly attention, both *Tityus* and *Phaeton* have been subject to only short commentaries and have not been significantly used in more profound analyses of Michelangelo's works. By far the richest scholarship on Michelangelo's drawings for Tommaso is from Saslow and Barkan, whose publications adopt a comprehensive approach to the subject of the use of Ganymede mythography in art.[175] These authors' works are valuable because they set a framework for understanding the popularity of *Ganymede* as a topos and also because both consider at length this particular myth's personal meaning for Michelangelo. Part of the strength of their perspectives is their acknowledgement that much closer, careful exploration and examination of Michelangelo's use of pagan

[174] These drawings were included in the Courtauld Institute's *Il Sogno* exhibition (2010) and are discussed in the catalogue: S. Buck, (ed.), *Michelangelo's Dream*, London, 2010. Other scholarly debate can be found in H. Chapman, *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master*, London, 2005; C. De Tolney, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, New York, 1964; E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1939; R. Liebert, *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images*, New Haven and London, 1983; A. Perrig, *Michelangelo's Drawings: The Science of Attribution*, (trans. Michel Joyce), New Haven and London, 1991; A. Schumaker, *Michelangelos 'teste divine'. Idealbidnisse als Exempla der Zeichenkunst*, Münster, 2007; W.E. Wallace, *Studies in Michelangelo's Finished Drawings* 1520-1534, New York, 1983.

[175] See Saslow, 1986 and Barkan, 1991.

themes in his presentation drawings for Tommaso remains to be done. However, although both Saslow and Barkan have commented on the connection between the depiction of physical intimacy in *Ganymede* and Michelangelo's own life, neither have offered detailed discourse on the ways in which the other drawings of *Tityus* and *Phaeton* also speak to the question of Michelangelo's erotic desires. My concern here is to neither duplicate of refute their work, but to consider wider possibilities that can open up with a view more orientated toward an interpretation of the confessional nature of *Ganymede, Tityus* and *Phaeton*, both individually and collectively, as developing stages of a single tragic experience.

My own analysis of *Ganymede* rests on building a new way of approaching the work that refers well beyond its function as one in a sequence of individual sheets in order to consider its significance tangentially within the totality of all three works. Using all three drawings as possible evidence of the respective myths' personal meaning for Michelangelo, I refine and extend existing scholarship with a more nuanced study of the complex and contingent relationship that exists between each, and to track and place their shared erotic potential and allegorical or exemplary functions within the sexual values of the period. There will be a response to the very different critical opinions of Erwin Panofsky and Robert Liebert who also recognise these drawings as a means of expression for Michelangelo's subtle ideas and interconnections of thoughts. Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* is a master narrative that has done salutary work in cross examining previous assumptions by using iconography as a principal tool of art analysis.[176] Panofsky's skill and diligence in identifying the iconographic and literary sources that can help unearth the meaning of a

[176] Panofsky tells us that the core field of pictorial analysis begins with the interpretive skill of reconstructing the significant meaning of a painting. It is the task of iconography to reconstruct the logic of the syntactic and semantic relationship between signs.

picture is beyond challenge, but, the manner in which the erotic element of these drawings has been subordinated, if not sacrificed, to heavy couching in high-minded Neo-platonic *raisons-d'être* needs its own questioning. In order to provide an adequate explanatory framework for Panofsky's reading of these drawings as alluding to 'the enraptured ascension of the mind', there will be recourse to textual sources reflecting the contemporary philosophical outlook advocated by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and other humanists in the Florentine Academy.[177] The extent to which Michelangelo invests these works with the philosophical ideas of his time and whether their content and allegorical meaning should also be read as expression of the ideals of *amor platonicus,* where the loving soul ascends to God as associated with the Neoplatonic paradigm, is addressed also. Panofsky's iconographical analysis, which takes into account this contemporary philosophical outlook and significant historical and individual events of the time, is compared to Liebert's approach to the artist's psychosexual history in *Michelangelo: A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images.* This chapter critically responds to the manner in which, in contrast to Panofsky's de-eroticised position, Liebert's focus falls squarely on sketching a kind of psychological portrait built on a reading of Michelangelo's art as an expression of unconscious, unresolved childhood conflicts and 'mythological portrayals of sublimated homosexual relationships'.[178]

Analysis of these intimate and personal drawings intended for Tommaso's eyes alone is undertaken in the chronological sequence of their execution. The chapter firstly engages with *The Rape of Ganymede* as the depiction of causal erotic desire, mystic union and up-lifting rapture (Fig. 46). Secondly, it considers *Punishment of Tityus* as an

[177] Panofsky, 1939, p. 142.
[178] Liebert, 1983, p. 258.

expression of the torturous and enslaving effect of the misery which guilty desire may generate (Fig. 47). Thereafter, there will be consideration of the complex and sophisticated *The Fall of Phaeton* as the ultimate consequence of such cause and effect (Fig. 48). The central premise of this chapter rests on the proposition that the complex subject matter and suggestiveness of these works calls for their reading as single components of a tripartite suite where every element of each composition is determined by the proceeding one, and determines the next to follow. By drawing on certain interrelated biographical circumstances which find correlation in the sonnets and letters Michelangelo wrote to Tommaso, a new reading of these drawings as edifying allegories of the cause, effect and consequence of fulfilled physical desire will be formulated. The chapter draws on a wide selection of primary textual material with the aim of bringing together a range of evidence about the inner meaning of the friendship shared by Michelangelo and Tommaso from contemporary sources and personal correspondence. Close study of the mythic narratives with which each of Michelangelo's drawings are intertwined is undertaken in order to explore the links between word and image, together with the facets of meaning that can be drawn out of his choice of relatively obscure pagan subjects. Consideration is also given to the extent to which correspondence exchanged between the couple during this time can provide rich evidence about which meanings were entered into and might be extracted from the drawings. As Barkan puts it, 'as genres, presentation drawings and sonnets are quite parallel: both are acts of introspection transferred into privacy *à deux*, but beyond that they are circulated within a larger, but still private, coterie'.[179] Biographical knowledge of the artist also proves immensely valuable in criticism of his works. Therefore, interrelated biographical circumstances are referenced relating to the time in which

[179] Barkan, 1991, p. 81.

Michelangelo executed the drawings whilst the pair was separated and the artist was working in Florence. A selection from the abundance of material relating to Michelangelo's life that has come down to us from Condivi, Vasari and other contemporaries is considered in order to establish whether a clear correspondence exists between his social and artistic character and the manifest themes of his drawings for Tommaso. In addition, I address Michelangelo's possible perception of the relationship between carnality and spirituality and consider the intellectual, ethical and religious implications that the works held for a pious man of his artistic stature operating within the moral and religious tenor of Renaissance Italy.

Understanding the kind of audience for whom the works were intended often helps to solve the question of meaning, and helps us think more concretely about how the work might have been conceived and understood. Tommaso de'Cavalieri was a noble young Roman who was introduced to Michelangelo in the autumn of 1532, when he was twenty-one and the artist was fifty-seven years old.[180] The circumstances of their meeting are unknown but Tommaso was of aristocratic descent and held minor civic offices in Rome which involved responsibility for various architectural projects. By the time of their meeting, Tommaso was already an educated humanist with sound literary skill, and by his mid-thirties he had an established reputation as an art collector and connoisseur of fine antiques. Tommaso married in 1538 at the age of twenty-seven and fathered two sons; one of whom, Emilio, went on to become a highly regarded musical figure and composer. The couple's deep friendship lasted over a period of thirty years until Michelangelo's death which preceded Tommaso's own in 1587 by twenty-four years.[181] Vasari informs us that the couple's relationship began as one of drawing

[180] A. Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo* (trans. C. B. Holroyd), London, 2006.
[181] See Tolney, New York, 1964.

tuition and also reports that the only known painted portrait Michelangelo ever executed was one of Tommaso whom he loved 'infinitely more than others'. [182] This work is now lost but Vasari describes it as a full-length cartoon depicting Tommaso in classical dress, holding a medal aloft in his hand. Michelangelo's attraction to Tommaso's physical appearance is further supported by Vasari's claim that the master 'hated to take anything from life unless it presented the very perfection of beauty'.[183] Tommaso's qualities are also testified by Benedetto Varchi who mentions that this 'noble young Roman, in whom I recognised apart from the incomparable beauty, so much comeliness of behaviour, and such excellent wit and gracious manner, that he well deserved, and deserves still, to be the more loved by those who came to love him better'.[184] Michelangelo's outpourings of admiration and desire for Tommaso, which are expressed with rhetorical flourish in his letters and poems, lend theoretical significance to the formulation of the interpretations of all three drawings. The artist was captivated by Tommaso's beauty and intellect, and he speaks passionately of a great love for the man with 'loving arms' who he described as the 'light of our age, unique in the world'.[185] Words, perhaps, painted what Michelangelo was unable to visually express, therefore his written expression of fervent passion, and its possible indication of desire for a physical as well as emotional love, are addressed as each case study considers the existence of a special resonance between verbal account and visual object.

It is, however, appropriate to pause briefly at this point to note how Michelangelo towered above his contemporaries in imagination, virtuosity and artistic aura but yet this

[182] For Vasari's account of the relationship and the presentation of the drawings see *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pintori, scultori, ed architettori,* Vol. 1, 1550-1568, Gaetono Milanesi, (ed.), Florence, 1878, pp. 865-69; Vol. 7, pp. 223 -72, (hereafter referenced as Vasari / Milanesi).
[183] Vasari / Milanesi, Vol.2, p. 195.
[184] B. Varchi, 1549, cited in E.H. Ramsden, *The Letters of Michelangelo*, Vol. 2, Stanford, 1963, appendix 37, p. 275.
[185] Vasari / Milanesi, Vol.7, p. 271.

'divine' master of great eminence expresses a sense of inferiority to a much younger Tommaso when he writes: 'But I should deem myself unborn, or rather stillborn, and should confess myself disgraced before heaven and earth, if from your letter I had not seen and believed that your lordship would willingly accept some of my drawings'.[186] Only two of Tommaso's letters have come down to us, both of which express a more attenuated affection that appears to acknowledge their disparate standing, as well as Michelangelo's need for reassurance. In one, Tommaso remarks that such lavish praise was 'insufficient to cause a man of such excellence as yourself and without a second, let alone a peer… I promise you truly that the love I bear you in exchange is equal or perhaps greater than I ever bore any man, neither have I ever desired any friendship more than I do yours.'[187] Several letters, dated late 1533, from Bartolomeo Angiolini who at the time was Michelangelo's friend and agent in Rome attest to the artist's need for reassurance about Tommaso's return of his affection.[188] For an artist of his stature, Michelangelo's fervent exaltation of Tommaso's merits may have stemmed from awareness that he could not claim for himself the same qualities of refined decorum, ideals of comportment, wealth, social position, humanist erudition and beauty of body and soul. This sense of inadequacy emerges from the poems also: 'then I recognised my fault and error: for if someone who lacked wings wished to pursue an angel, this would be as useless as throwing seeds on stones, words on the wind and the intellect on God'.[189]

[186] G. Poggi, Paola Barocchi and Renzo Ristori, *Il carteggio di Michelangelo,* Vol. 4, 1609, Letter 191, (hereafter referenced as *Carteggio*).
[187] E.H. Ramsden, *The Letters of Michelangelo: Vol. ii,* Stanford, 1963, p. 111.
[188] Extracts from these letters are translated in J. Addington-Symonds, *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti,* vol.2, London, 1899, pp. 142-7.
[189] C. Ryan, (trans.), *The Poetry of Michelangelo*: *An Introduction*, 'Sonnet 80', London, 1998, p.115.

Gift Giving

Michelangelo's presentation drawings for Tommaso are outstanding works which have not been given their rightful place among the master's corpus. This is particularly vexing because they are perhaps the highest achievement of Michelangelo's graphic output and rank amongst the greatest drawings of Western art. Moreover, these works are the artist's only securely attributable finished drawings of pagan subject matter conceived as a gift and thus deliberately exempt from the normal economy of commissioned art production of the period.[190] *Ganymede*, *Tityus* and *Phaeton* are an illustration of the artist's creative imagination freely at work – unencumbered by patronal approval, criticism or rejection. Unlike a work made under commission for a client, Michelangelo's singular and intimate gifts for Tommaso were actuated by emotion and love. As such, their intended audience was the recipient alone, therefore their conception and reception demanded from both friends a shared capacity to believe and understand a particularly intimate set of embodied semantic challenges and special interpretative efforts. Although the drawings found wider circulation once they were in Tommaso's possession, these were workings of profound personal attachment immersed in a discourse of secrecy and carried out as ends in themselves.[191] Like the sonnets Michelangelo wrote for his adored friend, these works were planned with meditated invention and painstaking application. The shared personal challenge was set by the range of meanings and precise applicability of each drawing's iconography which

[190] The matter of attribution will be addressed later in the chapter as each case study is examined.
[191] When word of Michelangelo's intimate gifts reached the court of Pope Clement VII they became a sensation. Acknowledging the *Fall of Phaeton* in his letter of 6th September 1533, Tommaso writes that he had been visited by the Pope, Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici and by everyone who wished to see the drawings. Tommaso apologises that *Tityus* was borrowed by the Cardinal to have an intaglio to be made in rock crystal by Giovanni Bernardi da Castelbolognese (1494-1553) but states that he 'worked very hard to save the Ganymede'. This gem was much admired by Vasari when he saw it in the Cardinal's collections and is now thought to be the one owned by The British Museum.

establishes the individual figures and their semantic relationships to each other. Furthermore, in order to fully interpret the pictorial narrative a heightened demand for hermeneutic engagement on the part of executor and recipient would have been necessary. Implicit within these drawings is a series of knowing allusions that have been deliberately built into meaning and form which would have challenged both parties' personal resources of belief and understanding in a manner which was well suited to the very cultivated circle of humanists with which Michelangelo and Tommaso were associated.

It should be noted at this juncture that Michelangelo executed two other drawings which are also generally accepted as having been presented to Tommaso, namely *The Dream* (*Il Sogno*) in 1532, and another in 1534 on which Vasari, not Michelangelo, bestowed the title *The Children's Bacchanal* (Figs. 49-50). *The Dream* has a semi-reclining adolescent male at its centre who gazes up towards a winged spirit which is awakening him with a blast from a trumpet. The figure rests against a globe placed upon a box of masks and is surrounded by personifications of the seven deadly sins.[192] *The Children's Bacchanal* features over thirty children, some of whom are inebriated. An old woman nurses two children in the foreground whilst a sleeping nude male is being cloaked by a group of small children.[193] My reasons for omitting close study of both of these two drawings are twofold; neither can be precisely related to any particular narrative so these drawings cannot be used as signifiers of a respective myth's personal meaning for Michelangelo. Furthermore, whereas *Ganymede*, *Tityus* and *Phaeton* can be securely traced to definitive written references in Tommaso's letters, and have their creator's stated intentions verified by autographed inscriptions, neither *The Dream* or

[192] Buck, 2010, pp. 11-13.
[193] Buck, 2010, pp. 138-40.

Bacchanal is mentioned in the correspondence which was exchanged between the pair at this time. I therefore conclude that it would be erroneous to assume that Michelangelo necessarily conceived these two other drawings in order to function as 'communication pieces' for Tommaso even if they too eventually ended up in the latter's possession.

The Rape of Ganymede

Ganymede sheds light on a complex matrix of aesthetic and allegorical associations that have at its nexus Michelangelo's thoughts and struggles over his love and desires for Tommaso. The origins for Michelangelo's drawing can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10:155-61) which relates Zeus's abduction of Ganymede, 'the most beautiful of all mortals' whom the god Zeus, in the guise of an eagle, took to heaven so that he could live there forever as his cup-bearer:

> The king of the gods once burned with love for Phrygian Ganymede, and something was found which Jove would rather be than what he was. Still he did not deign to take the form of any bird save only that which could bear his thunderbolts. Without delay he cleft the air on his lying wings and stole away the Trojan boy, who even now, though against the will of Juno, mingles the nectar and attends the cups of Jove.[194]

In an ekphrasis of an embroidered tapestry Virgil describes the Ganymede myth in the *Aeneid* as:

> Interwoven thereon the royal boy, with javelin and speedy foot, on leafy Ida tires fleet stags, eager, and like to one who pants; him Jove's swift amour-bearer has caught up aloft from Ida in his talons; his aged guardians in vain stretch their hands to the stars, and the savage barking of the dogs rises skyward.[195]

[194] Ovid, Book X, 155. Other versions of the Ganymede myth are related in Homer, *Iliad*, V, 265-7; XX, 231-35 and Virgil, *Aeneid*, V, 250-57.
[195] Virgil, *Aeneid*, Vol. I, Books 1-6, trans. H.R. Fairclough and E.Goold, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, p. 463.

The manner in which Michelangelo chose to preserve the conventions of pagan themes which were heavily freighted with moral meaning and metaphorical potency and their intrinsic connection to his convoluted thoughts on passion, guilt and renunciation is intriguing. Not least, because the textual framing of these drawings inserts a mythical discourse about life, death and righteousness squarely within the trajectory of the artist's broader path of thinking about his relationship with Tommaso. By unravelling the fabric of the narrative text as well as Michelangelo's representational modes deriving from them, I propose that he conceived these myths as the formal means through which visually processes a response to his own impulses.

Provenance and Origins

The original *Ganymede* drawing was mentioned along with *Tityus* in Tommaso's first letter to Michelangelo dated 1 January 1533 as one of two drawings the artist had sent him when the youth was ill: 'two of your drawings which Pier Antonio has brought me… the more I look at them, the more they please me, and I shall greatly appease my illness by thinking of the hope that the said Pier Antonio has given me of letting me see other things of yours'.[196] A further mention was made in a letter dated 6 September 1533 where Tommaso identifies his ownership of this *Ganymede* and the *Tityus*. In this letter Tommaso also acknowledges recent receipt of the *Phaeton* drawing. There is a further witty reference to the *Ganymede* in Sebastiano del Piombo's letter to his friend Michelangelo dated 17 July 1533, when Piombo mockingly suggests: 'As to the painting in the vault of the lantern. Our Lord leaves it to you to do what you like. I think

[196] *Carteggio,* DCCCXCVIII.

the Ganymede would look nice there, you could give him a halo so that he would appear as St. John of the Apocalypse carried to Heaven'.[197]

There are several versions of the Ganymede theme by or after Michelangelo; the most reliable of which is widely considered to be the one at the Fogg Museum (Fig. 46).[198] The original version is presumed lost but its popularity is verified by the fact that it was widely copied both as drawings and in other media.[199] Attribution of the Fogg *Ganymede* cannot be precisely determined, but, it is generally accepted on stylistic grounds that this version is an extant contemporary close copy by Michelangelo himself.[200] Another copy of *The Rape of Ganymede* by Giulio Clovio exists in the Royal Collection at Windsor but this is less detailed and incomplete with the lower half of the composition absent (Fig. 51). Both the Fogg and Windsor versions are regarded as close copies of the original, but it is widely thought that Michelangelo executed the Fogg *Ganymede* as a replacement for the lost original and that it is this version on which later copies and variants, including the Windsor drawing, were based.[201]

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[197] Vasari / Milanesi, quoted in Panofsky, 1939, p. 213. Sebastiano Piombo was a close acquaintance of Michelangelo and could have seen the drawing in the master's studio.

[198] Michelangelo was known to often make more than one version of his subject. This was the case for his *Phaethon* drawings which will be discussed later in the chapter.

[199] Grounds for this assumption seem to be based on the likelihood that the original *Ganymede* would have been executed in a horizontal format to harmonise its dimensions with the *Tityus* drawing sent to Tommaso at the same time; see Saslow, 1986, p. 19 and Barkan, 1991, p. 79, n. 95.

[200] Michael Hirst, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Andreas Schumaker and Alexander Perrig all concur that this Fogg version is attributable to Michelangelo. However, Charles de Tolnay and Christopher Frommel find this attribution controversial and consider the Windsor version more secure. Despite these divergent opinions, it is generally accepted that the central motif of boy and eagle in both the Fogg and the Windsor copies share the same iconographical source as the original. See C. De Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, Vol. 3, Princeton, 1948, p. 112 n. 4, 199, 220-21; C.L. Frommel, *Michelangelo und Tommaso dei Cavalieri: Mit der Ubertragung von Francesco Diaccetos 'Panegirico all'amore'*, Amsterdam, 1979, pp.41-45; M. Hirst, *Michelangelo Draftsman*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1988, p.103; M. Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings*, New Haven, 1988, pp. 11, 111-113, 127; A, Perrig. *Michelangelo's Drawings: The Science of Attribution*, London, 1991; Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, *Vittoria Colonna, Dichterin und Muse Michelangelo*, exh. cat., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1997, pp. 131-3; A. Schumaker, *Michelangelos 'teste divine'. Idealbidnisse als Exempla der Zeichenkunst*, Münster, 2007, pp. 23, 44, 58-60, 169-72.

[201] See Saslow (1986) p. 21, who observes that the Fogg sheet has incised stylus marks whereas the Windsor does not. These marks point to this Fogg version as being the source from which all others are copies. Hirst also gives primacy to the Fogg drawing on the basis of stylistic analysis, see M. Hirst, 'A Drawing of the *Rape of Ganymede* by Michelangelo' in S. Bertelli and G. Ramakas, (eds.), *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, Florence, 1978, Vol. II, pp. 253-60.

Description

At the centre of the vertical composition is a nude young and athletic Ganymede who is depicted frontally with genitals exposed. Ganymede is enveloped and born aloft by a much larger eagle that grasps him from behind. The eagle's head with an aggressively opened beak cranes across Ganymede's chest whilst the talons firmly seize and spread the young man's lower legs (Fig. 52). The youth's toes are curled as if in rapture and his left knee is bent whilst the right leg is extended and slightly behind. The young man's swooning expression appears to be deeply relaxed with eyes lowered and head tilted to his left. Both of Ganymede's arms are limply draped over the eagle's extended wingspan and a length of drapery billows from around his shoulders. The couple are both airborne and surrounded by a cushion of faintly sketched clouds and mist. The eagle's tail feathers protrude between the youth's splayed legs and the bird's reproductive area is thrust against the buttocks of the grasped Ganymede. The lower register of the composition consists of a faintly drawn pastoral scene with a barking dog looking skyward at the ascending pair (Fig. 53). A shepherd's staff is placed nearby on top of a drinking flask and a cloth scrip. A group of three sheep is visible just above and to the right of this object; two of which are standing but one is lying down.

Contemporary Extant Textual and Pictorial precedents

Robert Graves informs us that 'the Zeus-Ganymede myth gained immense popularity in Greece and Rome because it afforded religious justification for a grown man's passionate love for a boy'.[202] Michelangelo appears to embrace similar suggestive allusions to the erotic potential of Ganymede's abduction to serve Zeus's needs in the

[202] R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. 1, Baltimore, 1955, p. 117.

manner he takes on an unambiguous and sexual meaning in his mnemonic resuscitation of the myth. It can be assumed that the artist would probably have been alert to the sexual emphasis of Zeus's love for Ganymede from a variety of earlier sources such as the fourteenth- century *Ovide moralisé* - which states: 'Zeus saw him, young and fair; and abducted him from Tros, his father; carried him off to his realm and enjoyed himself with him many times, voluptuously against law and against nature.[203] Furthermore, Michelangelo's friend and old mentor Angelo Poliziano (1454-94) addressed the role of the Ganymede myth as a vehicle for physical desire and erotic expression in his writings. Any emphasis on the higher value of spiritual love is conspicuous in its absence in this *Stanze per la giostra*:

> Great Zeus bears witness to this creed, who, by the knot of sweet love held in thrall, enjoys in heaven his fair boy Ganymede. As Apollo on earth does for Hyacinth call. To this holy love did Hercules concede, he who felled giants till Hylas made him fall. I urge all husbands: seek divorce, and flee each one away from female company.[204]

In his erotically charged *Greek Epigrams*, a homogeneous picture emerges of Poliziano's understanding of the myth in carnal terms:

> Look down on me from heaven while I have my youth in my arms, and do not envy me, O Zeus; and I shall envy no one. Content yourself, O Zeus, with Ganymede, and leave me the splendid Chiomadoro who is sweeter than honey. O, I am thrice and four times happy! For truly I have kissed, and truly I have kissed again your mouth. O delightful youth! Intertwine your tongue with mine, O youth'.[205]

[203] Cited in E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, London, 1972, pp. 78-80, n.2.
[204] A. Poliziano, *Stanze per la giostra*, Book 1, stanza 107, cited in B. Maier, (ed.), *Stanze per la giostra*, Orfeo, 1968, p. 68.
[205] A. Poliziano, *Epigrammi greci* (Venice, 1498), 55, no. XXVI, ed. and trans. A. Ardizzoni, Florence, 1951.

It can be reasonably conjectured that the overtly erotic character of previous textual renditions might have cemented the Ganymede myth in Michelangelo's imagination as a subject for illustration of his own physical feelings and impulses. Although the very subject of Ovid's narrative is homoerotically suggestive in content, with his symbolic centrality of bodily pleasure Michelangelo has depicted his *Ganymede* with direct homoerotic expression. Whether Michelangelo found in *Ganymede* the visual articulation of his desire 'to love and be loved like Ganymede', as Saslow puts it, we cannot definitively answer.[206] But the originality of Michelangelo's pointedly erotic approach becomes clear when compared to the pictorial responses of his contemporaries. Examination of extant relevant pictorial responses to Ganymede mythography such as Filarete's *Rape of Ganymede* (c.1437) on the bronze doors of the Vatican and the Florentine *cassone* panels of *The Rape of Ganymede* (c.1475) by Apollonio di Giovanni (Figs. 54-55), with which the artist would surely have been familiar, reveals that these precedents do not share the same level of audacious bodily pleasure that exists in Michelangelo's version. The manner in which Ganymede is presented as if being physically penetrated from behind by Zeus points to Michelangelo's sexual reading of the myth. This is a passionate erotic embrace which, when read together with the sonnets written specifically for Tommaso, can be understood as signifying an uplifting desire to yield to the cause of such ecstatic sexual attraction. The work seemingly signifies the limitless possibilities and the heights to which Michelangelo aspired in his love of Tommaso and these feelings elevated him from the limitations inherent in his self.

[206] Saslow, 1986, p. 62.

Pictorial Analysis

Michelangelo's libidinal approach to the myth is underscored in the whole structure of the composition and in the manner he presents the drawing's symbolic and physical meanings as an ardently homoerotic expression in visual form. Michelangelo's compositional strategy is very simple with few distractions from the central narrative and the two key figures. Zeus is depicted enjoying the fulfilment of his desire as he carries off his beloved Ganymede, not just merely in a literal flight to heaven but in a figurative ascension to ecstasy. The boy meanwhile appears to share his captor's pleasure in the act with no sign of fear caused by his air-born rape or anticipation of love – but almost as if caught up in a unified climax. Rendering carnal ardour with imaginative directness and candour, Michelangelo positions Zeus in the form of the eagle clinging to the boy's back in a suggestive position which communicates a sexual act with considerable robustness. Full penetration is suggested by the postures in *Ganymede* with Zeus separating and grasping the boy Ganymede's legs and also with the tail that hovers at the boy's anal region (Fig. 56). This action is made more urgent and fervent by the grip on the boy's legs and the eagle's powerful embrace and upward thrust in a manner that renders an unequivocal undertone of homoerotic desire.

Michelangelo asserts through the figures' postures and expressions the message that the god is the dominant sexual partner. According to the principles of the day, Michelangelo appropriates lust, as the culturally weighted sign of masculine power, to Zeus in his guise of the sexually dominant eagle. The bird's overpowering stance is a marker of libido, vigour and strength that generates and reinforces the important values of assertive virility, patriarchal paternity and divine possession that conveys Zeus's authority as king of the gods. Meanwhile, in a manner that also appears to be culturally

reflexive, Michelangelo adopts the gendered correct role of a passive younger conquest for the boy when he renders Ganymede's serenity as also sexual passivity. Into these sexual paradigms Michelangelo inserts the notion that we are witnessing a very intimate and private moment with three key gestures which appear to personify Michelangelo's desire for intimacy and physical closeness; the tilt of Ganymede's head, Zeus's wings supporting the boy's arms and the pair's unification as if they are one entity. This visual interchange between boy and bird unites the pair as one entity and corroborates with the Ovidian narrative which states 'something was found which Jove would rather be than he was'.[207] The position of Ganymede's arms and his forward placement in the composition indicates this is an intimate moment with the two figures entirely concerned with each other as ecstasy carries them heavenward. The interconnectedness of boy and eagle is underscored in the analogy between Ganymede's extended arms and the eagle's outstretched wingspan, together with astute positioning of the boy's head so that it appears to emerge from the eagle's body (Fig. 57). This inextricability is further emphasised with a homology between the bird's talons and the claw-like character of Ganymede's feet and right hand (Fig. 58).

Michelangelo's anxieties about his feelings, even at this early stage, appear to be surfacing in the manner in which earthly duty and worldly concerns are rendered as if neglected. Along with the faithful dog whose duty is to tend the sheep, the viewer is left behind (Fig. 59). The dog is not mentioned in Ovid but features in Virgil's *Aeneid* (V, 25ff). Its inclusion here suggests that although Ovid's account was influential and familiar to Renaissance humanists, Michelangelo was also familiar with Virgil's version of the myth which describes 'Jove's swift amour bearer has caught up aloft from Ida in his talons; his aged guardians in vain stretch their hands to the stars, and the savage

[207] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X, p. 155.

barking of the dogs rises skyward'.[208] Winged flight is also a recurrent theme in Michelangelo's poetry for Tommaso which lends weight to the notion that the sonnets and the drawing give literary and artistic expression to the artist's feelings of surging rapture at this time:

> If one chaste love, if one sublime compassion, if one fortune affects two lovers equally, if one harsh fate matters as much to both, if one spirit, if one will rules two hearts;
>
> If one soul in two bodies is made eternal, lifting both to heaven and with the same wings; if Love with one blow and with one golden arrow burns and tests the bowels in two bosoms;
>
> If each loves the other, and neither himself, with one taste and with one delight, with this reward that both direct their will to the one end;
>
> If these were multiplied a thousand times and more, they would not make a hundredth part of such a bond of love, and of great faithfulness; and only disdain can break and dissolve it. [209]

Michelangelo adopts a particular format in *Ganymede* that emphasises physical separation when he creates a void at the lower part of the composition. This space between Tommaso, as the sole intended viewer, and the centre of the composition emphasises withdrawal from human contact on an earthly level. Michelangelo seems to embrace the possibility of Tommaso's participation with a sense of oscillation between the role of witness and participant, or between feelings of distance and involvement. This compositional strategy seems to suggest that, like his beloved friend, the object of desire is contemplated from afar and possessed visually but not physically. It is revealing that ecstasy is the primary emotion pervading both the *Ganymede* and Michelangelo's sonnets for his beloved Tommaso who was referred to as 'my sweet

[208] Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 5: 250-57.
[209] Ryan, 'Sonnet 59', 1998, p.100. In the absence of a universal system for numeration and dating of Michelangelo's poetic oeuvre, sonnets are numbered according to Ryan and Saslow's respective publications.

lord whom I desire forever in the eager embrace of my unworldly arms'.[210] Ganymede and Zeus appear to share a uniting ecstatic climax which can be read as the visual counterpart to Michelangelo's intimate poetic fantasies:

> I see with your beautiful eyes, a sweet light that with my blind ones I could never see; I bear with your feet, a burden upon me to which my lame ones are no longer accustomed. I fly, through lacking feathers, with your wings; with your mind I'm constantly impelled toward heaven; depending on your whim, I'm pale or red, cold in the sun, hot in winter's coldest depths. Within your will alone is my desire, my thoughts are created in your heart, and within your breath are my own words. Alone I seem as the moon is by itself: for our eyes are only able to see in heaven as much of it as the sun illuminates. [211]

Michelangelo's hopes for an uplifting and fulfilled relationship are articulated with poetic power by the way in which Zeus expresses his supremely masculine passion for the younger man in *Ganymede*. In *Sonnet 61*, the same principles in *Ganymede* are replicated with images of upward flight and celestial bliss in metaphoric language without naming the myth directly:

> But why go on lamenting, since I see in the eyes of this happy angel alone my peace, my rest and my salvation? Perhaps it would have been for the worse to have seen and heard him before, if he now gives me wings like his to fly with him, following where his virtue leads. [212]

[210] *Carteggio*, 4: CMXXXII.
[211] This translation is from J. Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation*, 'Sonnet 89', New Haven and London, 1991, p. 211.
[212] Ryan, 'Sonnet 61', 1998, p. 106.

The poetically physical but also romantically spiritual tenor of *Ganymede* finds itself once more in Michelangelo's written declaration of his attraction to Tommaso's beauty and virtue in *Sonnet 89*:

> My eyes, eager for beautiful things, and my soul no less for its salvation, have no other means by which they may ascend to heaven than to gaze on all such things.[213]

Since Michelangelo's practice of the arts was placed overwhelmingly in the service of religion, his choice of the Ganymede subject, which not only finds its ultimate source in pagan antiquity but is a myth of specifically male same-sex eroticism, must surely have a particular definitional force as an allegory of Michelangelo's own psyche. The infatuation that led Zeus to abduct Ganymede must surely have resonated with the smitten Michelangelo. As Barkan observes, this was: 'a time of exceptional aesthetic inspiration, and the Renaissance focused to the point of obsession on an antiquity that it had rediscovered and was to remake… uncovering and falling in love with the pagan past released formerly subjugated impulses – erotic, heroic, humane – a release which opened up the field of endeavour for the human …we must recognise instead that the complete footprint of the culture includes coercive social realities as well as dreams of liberation from them'.[214]

With a fantasy of mutual love, Michelangelo presented Tommaso with a visionary experience which differed starkly from the realities of daily life in the Renaissance. One of the keystones of pagan myth is the privilege of the gods to break essential human prohibitions and Michelangelo presents an interpretive field for *Ganymede* where

[213] Ryan, 'Madrigal 107', 1998, p. 125.
[214] Barkan, pp. 6-7, 23.

transgressive fantasy elides factuality. Our understanding of the formal means through which Michelangelo has visually processed his fantasy of mutual love in *Ganymede* is further heightened if we examine the drawing's parallels with *Sonnet 260*:

> To burn fiercely for immense beauty is not always a harsh and deadly fault, if it so softens the heart that a divine arrow may easily pierce it. Love arouses and awakens us, and gives us feathered wings, it does not prevent vain passion from becoming a flight on high: this serves as a first step towards the creator for the soul, which, not satisfied with it, rises and ascends to him. The love of which I am speaking aspires to the heights, it is too unlike a woman, and to burn for one ill becomes a wise and manly heart. The former shoots towards heaven, the latter shoots on earth; one dwells in the soul, the other in the senses, and looses the bow at low and senseless things.[215]

These selected examples of poetic rhetoric evoking the notion of uplifting passion signify how Michelangelo's feelings provided an immediate and powerful impetus for his sonnets. We might further adduce that this passion is translated visually into libidinal investment in *Ganymede* through its inhered exegesis of embedded symbols and meanings. In this regard, in both subject and composition the work gives concrete visual form to the lived experience of a man experiencing a causal fervour of passionate ascension at this early stage in his infatuation.

Critical Response to Published Commentaries on *Ganymede*

While I concur with Barkan's reading of *Ganymede* as 'an explicit message and a field of autobiographical reference both communicated and latent', we do not have the warrant to assume that Michelangelo's depiction of the boy being physically penetrated by Zeus confirms that the artist only intended a sexual reading of the myth.[216] Barkan's

[215] Saslow, 'Sonnet 260', 1991, p. 417.
[216] Barkan, 1986, p. 90.

comment that 'whatever the steps leading to Michelangelo's *Ganymede*, it seems about an explicit an image of anal penetration as a sixteenth-century picture could be' is an apt, albeit rather prosaic, assessment of the drawing's physical component but there can be no doubt that other readings are possible and relevant. [217] It would be a gross simplification, however, to take *Ganymede* as a straightforwardly homoerotic subject cast exclusively in homoerotic terms. Allegorical interpretation of myths was indeed a typical feature of Renaissance Neo-platonism which viewed events in ancient legends as depicting the fate of the soul.[218] Michelangelo and Tommaso operated within this Neo-platonic cultural milieu; therefore, the possibility that the image's carnality could also veil a more spiritual or euhemeristic meaning that vocalises these philosophical currents cannot be entirely discounted. If we are to gain deeper understanding of the great emotional, moral and artistic capital which Michelangelo appears to have invested in *Ganymede*, then it is necessary to consider other interpretive possibilities which can assist our thinking about how, exactly, we can encounter, experience, and understand the many facets of meaning that can be drawn out of the work. Having argued in the preceding pages that Michelangelo conceived of *Ganymede* as a response to the cause of his physical passion, it is also necessary to address a selection of differing critical responses.

For Panofsky, *Ganymede* represents a complete and eloquent expression of 'the enraptured ascension of the mind'.[219] In essence, Panofsky is following the philosophy codified and developed by Marsilio Ficino and his school at the Medicean Platonic Academy which asserted that 'the soul is enflamed by a divine splendour; glowing in

[217] Barkan, 1986, p. 89.
[218] For an illuminating account of Renaissance Neo-platonism see E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London, 1958.
[219] Panofsky, 1939, p. 142.

the beautiful person as in a mirror; and secretly lifted up by it as by a hook in order to become God'.[220] Panofsky bases his reading of *Ganymede* on the Neo-platonic paradigm but pays no heed to how Michelangelo embeds pictorially within a definitively homoerotic narrative his sexually explicit rendition of carnality between boy and god.[221] Instead, Panofsky imbues a spiritual significance to *Ganymede* and interprets the inner meaning of the myth as the cult of beauty and as Michelangelo's divine idea of attaining the ultimate spiritualised formulation. However a return to such ideas which only invites a reading of the work as Michelangelo's philosophical immersion and investment in the Neo-platonic theme of the soul ascending to heaven is far from progressive. As Barkan remarks: 'Panofsky's claim that ''Ganymede, ascending to Heaven on the wings of an eagle, symbolises the ecstasy of Platonic love, powerful to the point of annihilation, but freeing the soul from its physical bondages and carrying it to a sphere of Olympian bliss'' would do justice to a medieval mythographer'.[222] It is possible that the omission of any libidinal component from his analysis of Michelangelo's drawing could underscore the possibility of subjectivity in Panofsky's interpretation and perhaps reflect a personal or cultural blind spot. Nevertheless, I take respectful issue with Panofsky's insistence on an almost relentless reading of the narrative as a Neo-platonic ecstasy which facilitates the contemplation of divine secrets because he does not speculate on the presence or absence of a sexual dimension when he remarks: 'thus it cannot be questioned that this drawing symbolises the *furor divinus*, or to be more precise, the *furor amatorius*, and this is not in an abstract or general way but as an expression of the truly Platonic, all-pervasive and all-

[220] M. Ficino, *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1576), 306, cited in P.O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, New York, 1943, p. 267.
[221] For the centrality of love in Renaissance Neo-Platonism, see N. A. Robb, *Neo-Platonism of the Italian Renaissance*, New York, 1968.
[222] Barkan, 1991, p. 79.

effacing passion which had shaken Michelangelo's life when he had met Tommaso Cavalieri'.[223] In pursuit of this Neo-platonic model Panofsky searches for the hidden philosophical meaning in *Ganymede* but in doing so neglects what is offered up by the work's sexual implication. When Panofsky opines that *Ganymede* is solely a Neo-platonic analogy for divine love, he is resurrecting the philosophy of Cristoforo Landino (1424-98), who proclaimed:

> Ganymede is the human mind, his associates the inferior attributes of the human spirit, and the eagle divine love; God knows the spirit and bears it, freed of its baser qualities, to Heaven, where, transcending the limitations of the body, it lives in contemplation of the mysteries of heaven.[224]

Such Neo-platonic thinking originated with Ficino who developed a Christian interpretation of Plato aimed at revitalising Catholic theology by infusing what he saw as stagnant Christian dogma with compatible elements from the recovered Platonic corpus.[225] The admiration of pure love, desire and beauty was of prime importance to Ficino's attempt to reconcile and combine the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and the beliefs of the Christian Church. In his *Commentary on the Symposium of Plato* (1492), Ficino proclaimed that the love of beauty led to union with and contemplation of God:

> Beauty is a certain vital and spiritual grace, which is infused first into the Angel by the divine ray, then into the spirits of men, and following these, into corporeal forms; and this grace by means of reason and sight moves and delights our spirit; and in delighting, enraptures, and in enrapturing, inspires ardent love.[226]

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[223] Panofsky, 1939, p. 216.
[224] C. Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (c. 1474) cited in T. B. Deutscher and P. G. Bietenholz, (eds.), *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, Toronto, 2003, p. 75.
[225] For an account of Ficino and Neo-Platonism, see Kristeller, 1943.
[226] M. Ficino, 'What things are Needed to Make a Thing Beautiful, and that Beauty is a Spiritual Gift' in *Commentary on the Symposium of Plato*, 1492, trans. J. Peake and cited in E. Panofsky *Idea; A Concept in Art Theory*, Columbia, 1968, p. 137.

The immortality of the soul lies at the centre of Ficino's philosophy, because immortality is needed to justify his interpretation of human existence as a continuing effort of contemplation. Since the gender hierarchy dictated males were valued over females, men were considered the proper objects of desire for other men since only men were thought truly capable of contemplating the divine. Love and carnal desire, according to Plato, were supposed to be separate; desire was wrong if it was entirely physical or for the wrong person, love was an inner quality which radiated outward and was attracted to beauty. For Plato, true knowledge was attained through recognition of perfection and love of the particular physical beauty of another; therefore a true understanding of transcendent love could only be achieved if corporeal pleasure was set aside. As followers of Plato's philosophy, Ficino and his school also regarded beauty particularly that of the male body, as the visible evidence of the Divine. In his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, Ficino asserts that the love of beauty led to union with and contemplation of God and makes a distinction between heavenly love and carnal love in terms of body/soul dichotomy:

> Some men either on account of their nature of their training, are better equipped for offspring of the soul than for those of the body. Others, and certainly the majority of them, are the opposite. The former pursue heavenly love, the latter earthly. The former, therefore, naturally love men more than women. [227]

According to Plato, Ganymede mythography was invented as an exercise in absolving the Cretan taste for young boys:

> We must not forget that this pleasure is held to have been granted by nature to male and female when conjoined for the work of procreation; the crime of male with male, or female with female, is an outrage

[227] M. Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivo Platonis*, 1484, cited in *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. J. Sears, 2nd edition, Columbia, 2002, p. 207. On Ficino and homoeroticism, see G. Kent and G. Hekma (eds.), *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, London, 1989, pp. 33-65.

> on nature and a capital surrender to lust of pleasure. And you know it is our universal accusation against the Cretans that they were the inventors of the tale of Ganymede; they were convinced, we say, that their legislation came from Zeus, so they went on to tell this story against him that they might, if you please, plead his example for their indulgence in his pleasure too.[228]

For Ficino also the immortality of the soul was a basic axiom and love was the force that led the soul from the physical world to a higher spiritual level and hence to the divine. Ficino's spiritual emphasis on a pure love has resonance with Plato's *Phaedrus* which also de-eroticises the Ganymede myth:

> As he comes close to his lover in the gymnasium and elsewhere, that flowing stream which Zeus, as the lover of Ganymede, called 'the flood of passion', pours in upon the lover. And part of it is absorbed within him, but when he can contain no more the rest flows away outside him, but when he can contain no more the rest flows away outside him, and as a breath of wind or an echo, rebounding from a smooth hard surface, goes back to its place of origin, even so the stream of beauty turns back and re-enters the eyes of the fair beloved; and so by the natural channel it reaches his soul and gives it fresh vigour, watering the roots of the wings and quickening them to growth: whereby the soul of the beloved, in its turn, is filled with love… he possesses that counter-love which is the image of love, though he supposes it to be friendship rather than love and calls it by that name.[229]

Further evidence of the unresolved paradoxes surrounding the ambivalence of the myth in antiquity can be found in the *Symposium*, where there is another attempt by Xenophon to suppress the sexual element in Ganymede mythography by expatiation of the spiritual rather than the carnal dimension:

> Not only humankind but also gods and demi-gods set higher value on the friendship of the spirit than on the enjoyment of the body… And even in the

[228] Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. and trans. A. E. Taylor, New York, 1961, p. 636.
[229] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth, Cambridge, 1972, p. 255.

> case of Ganymede it was not his person but his spiritual character that influenced Zeus to carry him up to Olympus.[230]

However, another set of opposing canonical literary attitudes from antique sources throws into question the supposition that a sexual dimension should be dismissed in this manner. Theognis reveals that the myth has a homoerotic agency transmitted across time when he remarks that: 'The love of boys has been a pleasant thing ever since Ganymede was loved by the son of Kronos who brought him to Olympus'.[231] In *Hesiod and Theognis*, the Ganymede story is also imbued with an unambiguous and sexual meaning when Euenos seeks mythological justification for his love of boys:

> The love of boys is sweet. Even the king of gods, the son of Kronos, loved a boy Ganymede, and he took him to his home Olympus, and he gave divinity to him, because he had a lovely bloom of youth. Don't be surprised, Simondes, to see me love and serve a handsome boy'.[232]

Michelangelo's erotic treatment of the myth finds another rhetorical parallel in Homer's *Hymn to Aphrodite*. The libidinous potential of the mythic narrative is once more unambiguously invoked when Aphrodite uses the Ganymede story as a suggestive allusion to the merits of making love to a god in her seduction of Anchises:

> And yet, of all mortal humans, the closest to the gods by far are those who come from your family line, both in looks and in constitution. Why, there was blond Ganymede, whom Zeus the master of *mêtis* abducted on account of his beauty, so that he may be together with the immortal ones, as wine-pourer for the gods in the palace of Zeus, a wonder to behold, given his share of *tîmê* by all the immortals, pouring red nectar from a golden mixing-bowl.[233]

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[230] Xenophon, *Anabasis, Books IV-VII and Symposium and Apology*, trans. C. L. Brownson and O.J. Todd, London, 1953, p. 29.
[231] Theognis, *Pseudo Pythagorus*, Elegy 2, lines 1345-50, trans. and ed., D. Young, Leipzig, 1961.
[232] Hesiod, *Hesiod and Theognis*, trans. D. Wender, Harmondsworth, 1973, Vol. II, pp. 1345-50.
[233] Homer, *Hymn to Aphrodite*, cited in Sergent, 1987, p. 208.

As the preceding section reveals, *Ganymede* can readily be understood as depicting an apotheosis of sexuality but it is, of course, possible, even likely, that Michelangelo also imbued the work with alternative interpretive possibilities that offered a visual continuum between earthly and divine experience. It is my contention that carnal desire supplies the primary dynamic of this work but that *Ganymede* also codifies, albeit to a lesser extent, in lofty philosophical sentiment the artist's own spiritual aspirations. *Ganymede* may well be alluding to a balance between physical ardour and a spiritual or religious sentiment which allows the lover to leave the condition of sensual love behind, to accede to a superior world, and to know God to the extent permitted to the human soul. But the overt sexual component of *Ganymede* throws into question the supposition that spiritual love of God and chaste philosophical or intellectual intercourse are the only interpretive possibilities. As a counterweight to Panofsky's sanitised Neo-platonic interpretation of Michelangelo's *Ganymede* and Barkan's polarised utilisation of more pointedly erotic critical concepts, I will review the dually psychoanalytic and historical perspectives advanced by Robert Liebert who offers a very different framework of interpretation for the drawing.

Liebert's field of questioning is, at base, psychological rather than art historical and he asserts that one of the keys to understanding the profound meaning of these works for Tommaso is the 'complexity and contradictions in Michelangelo's relationship with his father'.[234] Liebert sketches a psychological portrait of Michelangelo which interprets his art as an expression of unconscious, unresolved childhood conflicts and also determines that the master manifested in his art the unconscious desire to 'restore his relationship with his first loving, adoptive father,' -

[234] Liebert, 1983, p. 47.

Lorenzo the Magnificent.[235] Liebert builds on this conjecture with an Oedipal reading of the ambiguous paternalism that he claims can be found in Michelangelo's poems for Tommaso. Liebert sees Michelangelo's works as redolent with themes which concerned him most – paternal omnipotence, filial ambivalence, the Oedipal struggle against his father, its repression and consequences: 'the controlling fantasy and unconscious conflict that determined the artistic resolution, in form and content, of many of his works involved the yearning for eternal union with an idealised, powerful paternal transformation'.[236] While Liebert's valorisation of Oedipus may possibly be justifiable in a more modern psychoanalytical context, the universal validity of retrospectively applied psychoanalysis has yet to be proven since such methodology is inherently unverifiable. Liebert does raise interesting issues in relation to Michelangelo's art as the reflection of the conflicting dynamic of individual desire and social constraint but I believe that his modern psychoanalytic methods have dubious efficacy in interpreting the art of the past. The plausibility that Michelangelo sublimated repressed desire in his art has considerable currency but I would call into question Liebert's claim that 'there are certain invariable laws of human behaviour which operate in all individuals, irrespective of period and culture' on the grounds that sexual taxonomies are historically and culturally contingent.[237] Liebert asserts that Michelangelo's relationship with Tommaso was predicated on 'spiritual kinship but not sexuality' but there are no grounds, either psychologically or empirically, for him to conclude or refute the possibility that Michelangelo's love for the young Roman nobleman progressed to physical consummation.[238] Liebert's analysis of Michelangelo's artistic and literary output appears to be an exercise in justifying an already prescribed psychological profile

[235] Liebert, 1983, p. 64.
[236] Liebert, 1983, pp. 171-4.
[237] Liebert, 1983, p. 3.
[238] Liebert, 1983, pp. 294-5.

of the artist or an attempt at validating the role of modern psychoanalytic theory as a trans-historical critical concept in general terms.[239] Overall, I consider the merits of Liebert's methodology to be flawed because the erotic expression evident in Michelangelo's interpretation of Ganymede's mythography requires a more complex and thoughtful reading than that provided by the analyst's attempt to see the whole of his artist's corpus through the perspective of one psychoanalytical trope alone.

In sum, I can think of no work of art from the Renaissance which characterises the ambiguity of ecstasy more successfully than Michelangelo's *Ganymede*, with its concomitant evocation of ardent erotic desire alongside the love of beauty associated with contemplation of and union with the divine. Michelangelo operated in an area of contagion between causal erotic desire and love of God and, perhaps, *Ganymede* is an attempt to safely locate his emotions between the physicality of his desires and the spiritual or philosophical tenor of the world he inhabited. A resolution to these complex emotions is perhaps indicated by how he perceived Tommaso as his salvation here on earth. Certainly, the elevated and elevating definitions of the ecstasy of his love for Tommaso appear to be visually conveyed in *Ganymede* as the ascension of his hopes beyond the bounds of earthy restrictions to a different, immaterial plane of being. Michelangelo's letters reveal that his emotions were more powerfully transmitted through pictorial illustration and poetic rhetoric than prose, thus *Ganymede* finds sympathetic articulation in his sonnets where he poetically compares his love of Tommaso to that of the divine: 'My eyes, eager for beautiful things, and my soul no less

[239] See S. Greenblatt, 'Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture', in P. Parker and D. Quint, (eds.), *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, Baltimore, 1986, pp. 210-24.

for its salvation, have no other means by which they may ascend to heaven than to gaze on all such things'.[240]

Of the critical responses considered above, Saslow's conjectures are the most sound because he also theorises that these two implications are by no means incompatible: 'The drawings, using the established allegorical vocabulary of Neoplatonic humanism, simultaneously communicate the artist's intense individual emotions and locate these feelings within a broader system of values that interlinks love, passion, beauty, ecstasy, and experience of the divine'.[241] It is my own conclusion that the pivotal key to understanding the profound meaning of *Ganymede* is an understanding of what Michelangelo might have perceived, or fantasised, as an uplifting experience valorising his fervent sense of ecstasy and desire rather than actual consummation of the sexual act. The drawing has offered fruitful ground for speculation. The theories propounded by the above scholars throw light on Michelangelo's work in several respects, and in many ways their diversity reflects the obliquity with which homoeroticism was often presented in the Renaissance. I propose that we should not declare one set of assertions to the drawing because there are qualities of explicit, unabashed and loving depictions of sexual fulfilment in *Ganymede* as well as an apparent allusion to certain Neoplatonic ideas and modes of expression. This argumentation is based on the idea of a balance between Michelangelo's imagining of fulfilled erotic desire, rather than the physical enactment of sex, fused with his profound desires for the soul's ascent to God. Conflict between these two fundamentally opposed interpretations can be resolved if *Ganymede* is understood as Michelangelo's pictorial expression of the cause of his concupiscent desire, but that he also exposes the

[240] Ryan, 'Madrigal 107', 1998, p. 125.
[241] Saslow, 1986, p. 18.

work to the purifying air of a Platonising veneer which speaks to his spirituality. In these terms, the drawing possesses a double aspect which represents a visual continuum between earthly desire of body and the spiritual aspirations of the soul and can thus be connected with the dualistic sense of love and longing, death and salvation that Michelangelo poetically expresses with his sonnets for Tommaso in a perfectly consistent way.

The Punishment of Tityus

As stated above, Michelangelo's drawing of *Ganymede* must be viewed not only in the context of both classical and contemporary sources but also with its companion presentation pieces in mind. The drawings of *The Punishment of Tityus* (Fig. 60) and *The Fall of Phaeton* (Fig. 61) have received even less critical analysis than *Ganymede* within art historical scholarship both past and present. Any potential that the three works, if analysed together, can reveal a more sophisticated collective approach that broadens and enriches the hidden possibilities of the subject has been in large part overlooked to date, but in this section I argue for the existence of a uniting narrative for *Ganymede, Tityus* and *Phaeton* which expresses Michelangelo's conflict and anguish over the cause, effect and consequence of the dangerous triangle between spirituality, physicality and carnality. I also offer the hypothesis that there are complex intersections and an overarching narrative linking the *Tityus* drawing with the *Risen Christ* sketch on the verso of this sheet (Fig. 75).

Textual Sources and Narrative

Tityus was a Phokian giant who attempted to rape the goddess Leto, mother of Apollo and lover of Zeus, as she was on her way to Delphi. Her son Apollo came to the rescue

and despatched the giant with his arrows and golden sword. His ordeal was that there was to be no reprieve in his endless suffering so as further punishment for the crime, Tityus was condemned to eternal torment in the underworld. There he was staked to the ground and two vultures were set to feed on his ever regenerating liver - the seat of carnal desire.[242] The Tityus myth is a feature of Homer's *Odyssey* which was available in the Renaissance.[243]

> Odysseus describes of the shades of the dead he saw in the underworld: I saw Tityus also, son of the mighty goddess Gaia; he lay on the ground, his bulk stretched out over nine roods. Two vultures, one on each side of him, sat and kept plucking at his liver, reaching down to the very bowels; he could not beat them off with his hands. And this was because he had once assaulted a mistress of Zeus himself, the far-famed Leto, as she walked towards Pytho through the lovely spaces of Panopeus.[244]

Also in Virgil's *Aeneid* (6. 595):

> Tityus too, the nursling of [Gaia the Earth] who mothers all, was to be seen in Tartarus, his body pegged out over a full nine acres, a huge vulture with hooked beak gnawing for ever his inexhaustible liver, the guts that are rich in torment, pecking away for its food, burrowing deep through the body it lives in, and giving no rest to the always-replenishing vitals.

A possible pictorial predecessor to Michelangelo's *Tityus* is a Roman marble *Fallen Giant* in the Museo Nationale in Naples which might have been in Rome in the early sixteenth century (Fig. 62). It is also possible that Michelangelo was acquainted with a Venetian woodcut *Punishment in Hades*, (1517) by an unknown artist in an

[242] Tityus mythography has its sources in Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI, 595ff.), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV, 457-56) and Dante's *Divine Comedy: Inferno* (XXXI).
[243] For an account of the Renaissance knowledge of the works of Homer, see R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, 1969, p. 31, pp. 137-8.
[244] Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray, revised G. E. Dimmock, Cambridge, Mass., 1995, 11.576.

illustrated edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and now in the British Library, London (Fig. 63).[245]

Attribution and Description

This drawing's attribution is unchallenged since *Tityus* was twice mentioned in correspondence between Michelangelo and Tommaso. Although identification is unanimous, there is some debate about the verso which has a study of the resurrected Christ.[246] The horizontal composition of *Tityus* is dominated by a rock formation which extends the width of the drawing, on which lays a supine and athletically built Tityus who is overpowered by a large bird of similar proportions which looms over him with a long neck and extended wings. The bird's head and beak are positioned just over the man's left ribcage. Tityus has his right arm tethered to the rock but a free left arm which is straightened and relaxed. The left leg is bent with his foot positioned under an almost fully extended and loosely tied right leg. Tityus's torso is twisted slightly with the upper half directed toward the picture plane and the lower part of his body below the waist leaning backwards. Tityus has no signs of scarring on his abdomen from the bird's pecking and there is no definitive exposition of pain. His head of curly light hair is pivoted over his left shoulder with an intent gaze directed at the swooping bird which has talons gripping Tityus's right shoulder (Fig. 64). Tityus's face and furrowed brow bear an expression of bewilderment whilst the bird has a fierce and threatening appearance. A faintly drawn gnarled tree trunk is positioned at the left edge of the rock formation which has a root structure mirroring that of the bird's talons and a protruding

[245] See Perrig 1991, pp. 76-7; Schumacher, 2007, p. 174 for suggestions that Michelangelo knew this work. Michelangelo's tendency to reuse paper is well known, but Berenson and Hartt have aired conflicting opinions on whether recto or verso was executed first.

[246] Both Perrig and Schumacher see the *Risen Christ* as inferior, and attribute the verso drawing of the risen Christ to Tommaso himself, who as a budding draftsman and the recipient of *Tityus*, could have used the sheet to trace his own version of the body of Christ onto the reverse of Michelangelo's *Tityus*.

tormented and screaming face (Fig. 65). A diminutive and lightly drawn figure is depicted to the right as if escaping or being sucked in by the open jaws of the tree-bound face. Directly under this tree at the shoreline of the rock formation a barely discernible small crab shelters in a crevice (Fig. 66).

The Punishment of Tityus as pendant to *The Rape of Ganymede*

My previous commentary on *Ganymede* has centred on the premise that elevating passion may have informed Michelangelo's initial thoughts. But by the very nature of its imagery and narrative, *Tityus* seems to be an extreme statement on the destructive force of that same love. Michelangelo's choice of subject in the *Tityus* drawing suggests that he chose to depart from the evocation of the ecstasy of ideal love depicted in the Ganymede narrative. Having introduced the Ganymede theme to Tommaso, with his *Tityus*, Michelangelo now progresses to a fully realised interpretation of yet another myth laden with sexual meaning. As De Tolnay opines: 'Tityus is a symbol of the defenceless state of one who loves and the embodiment of fear and suffering that love brings'.[247] I contend, however, that *Tityus* can be understood as the communication of Michelangelo's own suffering by means of pictorial re-enactment and an expression of the effect of Michelangelo's physical desire upon his emotions. Considered this way, it is possible to see how the relative merits of passion and love in the *Ganymede* are juxtaposed against the dangers of capitulation to sexual desire in the *Tityus***.** This interconnection clarifies the full sense of the drawing by which Michelangelo skilfully connects the subject with seemingly unexpressed tensions and hidden feelings which engulfed his mind at times of passion and guilt. Therefore, Michelangelo's *Tityus* could

[247] C. De Tolney, *Michelangelo: The Medici Chapel*, Vol. III, Princeton, 1948 pp. 111-5.

be seen as the iconographic counterpart to the causal ecstasy of *Ganymede.* However, in this instance, the principal focus is not the joyous rapture which he has encapsulated in the first drawing but the misery which guilty desire may generate. If *Ganymede* is understood as symbolising the ecstasy of ideal love, then it could follow that *Tityus* conveys the agonising effect upon Michelangelo's emotions of that same sensual passion as it feeds upon itself and devours his very soul. With its negative theme of captured enslavement, isolation and tortuous punishment, *Tityus* is the absolute antithesis of the positive evaluations the artist seems to have associated with emotional freedom, intimacy and physical closeness in *Ganymede*. When read together *Ganymede* and *Tityus* symbolise the dual nature of a love that both uplifted and debased Michelangelo's emotions tangentially. There can be little doubt that a close affinity existed between Michelangelo's art and his poetry where in his own words:

> Just as within pen and ink there exist the lofty and the low and the middling style, and within marbles are images rich or worthless, depending on what our talents can draw out of them, thus, my dear lord, there may be in your breast as much pride as acts of humility; but I only draw out of it what's suitable and similar to me, as my face shows.
>
> As earthly rain from heaven, single and pure, is turned into various forms by various seeds, one who sows sighs and tears and pains harvests and reaps from them sorrow and weeping; and one who looks on high beauty from great sadness is sure to draw from it harsh pain and suffering.[248]

[248] Saslow, 'Sonnet 84', 1991, p.197.

Pictorial Analysis

In both *Ganymede* and *Tityus*, Michelangelo does not encourage a narrative reading of either theme; instead he freezes in time the moments of ecstasy and agony he associates with overwhelming physical attraction. Having chosen his lateral compositional solution for *Tityus*, Michelangelo then refines it by depicting within this framework a very precise moment from the myth as if in the full knowledge of its potential effect upon Tommaso. In *Tityus*, the subject has been placed visually on the front plane and tilted forward as if projected into Tommaso's, the intended sole viewer, own space. A close connection is thus established between the act of retribution and torture and those witnessing this scene of punishment for debased earthly lust. A powerful index that Michelangelo attached personal meaning and significance to *Tityus* is revealed by the manner in which the artist reinvented, recast and updated the myth with a basic composition which is not, in itself, a faithful pictorial response to the narrative. Tityus's sexual attack is mentioned and morally deplored in the classical texts but these traditional narratives have as its basis punishment for unwelcome and unsuccessful seduction of a female. Given that Michelangelo had no interest in women and no known romantic association with either sex before Tommaso, it seems safe to assume that *Tityus* should be seen as the iconographic counterpart to the causal ecstasy of *Ganymede* but that its didactic purpose does not allude to heterosexual lust for women in this context. More saliently, it would appear that it is the underlying theme of the Tityus story with its punishment of unwelcome and unsuccessful seduction which provides the tactic foundation for Michelangelo's interpretation. In this instance forbidden lust and its attendant suffering are the myth's key drivers, and therefore it is more likely that the heterosexual context has been set aside by Michelangelo in favour of an improvised interpretation laden with metaphoric and allegorical meaning that depends on the

symbolic idea of the act of punishment itself. This reading of the Tityus narrative is all the more secure in light of how the artist's sonnets also imply a realisation of the consuming agony that yielding to physical love for Tommaso would bring:

> I weep, I burn, I waste away, and my heart is fed by all this. O sweet destiny! Who else is there who lives only on his death, as I do, on suffering and pain? Oh, cruel archer, you know just the moment in which to put to rest, with your powerful hand, out brief and anguished misery; for one who lives on death never dies.[249]

The very fact that Michelangelo has introduced this departure from the myth by exchanging the two vultures for a single eagle suggests strongly that he transformed this particular narrative into a very personal pictorial parable where the uplifting bearer of Michelangelo's heavenly delight in *Ganymede* is now the destructive aggressor that consumes him for eternity in *Tityus*. In comparison to *Ganymede*, homoerotic innuendo is downplayed in *Tityus* in favour of a more moralistic and didactic strategy that suggests Michelangelo confronted in close succession conflicting issues surrounding his infatuation with Tommaso. This allusion to the negative effect of impure thought is heightened if we examine how Michelangelo makes a play on Cavalieri's name and also links the metaphors of tethering and capture with being 'an armed cavalier's prisoner' in the following sonnet:

> Why should I still pour out my intense desire in weeping or in mournful words, if heaven, which clothes all souls with such a fate, strips no one of it, either early or late? Why does my tired heart still make me long to languish if others must also die? Therefore let my final hours be made less wearisome for these eyes, since all other good is worth less than all my pain. Yet at least, if I cannot dodge the blow I steal and rob from him-if it's ordained- then who will win out between sweetness and sorrow? If, to be happy, I must be conquered and chained, it is no

[249] Saslow, 'Sonnet 74', 1991, p. 183.

> wonder that, naked and alone, an armed cavalier's
> prisoner I remain.[250]

We might further adduce that Michelangelo built into his intentionality personal meaning and significance with yet another deliberate divergence from traditional readings of the myth. The theme of sexual intercourse and bird physiology are common to both the *Ganymede* and *Tityus*, but an anomaly is presented in the latter drawing when Michelangelo depicts just one bird resembling an eagle rather than the vultures cited in the mythography.[251] It can be argued that the appearance of these unifying visual motifs in both compositions could be more than coincidence and that when considered in this way it appears that Michelangelo's presentation drawings for Tommaso are anything but mere illustrations of textual interpretations. This tactical substitution of two vultures for a single eagle in *Tityus* signifies a precise and individual interpretation of the narrative which provides it with a specific quality and interest. To my mind, this deployment of the same emblematic *Ganymede* eagle in *Tityus,* and its reappearance in the later *Phaeton,* identifies a unique and unifying principle which began as elated causal physical passion but then unfolds throughout the other works for Tommaso into the graphic visualisation of the effect and consequences that attend such desires (Figs. 67-69).

In what appears to be a statement on the destructive nature of unrequited love, Michelangelo has chosen as his subject for *Tityus* the moment between despair and the deliverance of punishment by the bird as Tityus lays recumbent. Here, in contrast to the

[250] Saslow, 'Sonnet 98', 1991, p. 226.
[251] This substitution with the iconographic motif of an eagle underlines my initial suggestion that there could have been a conscious intention to thus visually fuse *Tityus* with narratives surrounding the earlier *Ganymede* and the later *Phaeton*.

tranquil misty sphere of philosophical and emotional bliss conveyed in *Ganymede*, a debased Tityus is tethered to Tartarus, the abyss in the underworld even lower than Hades, where souls were judged after death and received punishment. Michelangelo was the sublime executor of the male body in struggle and his rendering of the giant in *Tityus*, with all its implied attendant suffering, exemplifies how the artist used the male nude as the most powerful instrument of expression. Michelangelo appears to graphically realise the forms that exist in his mind when, in contrast to the shared intimacy of the protagonists in *Ganymede*, Tityus is exposed and isolated as he faces his punishment for sexual transgression.

The drawing's composition and its fine execution signify that Michelangelo devoted much time and attention to the depiction of Tityus's meticulously rendered body and its well-balanced posture. For Michelangelo, the depiction of the perfect human body was the ultimate goal and limit of artistic virtuosity in an intellectual and technical sense. Hence, *Tityus* encompasses both anatomical accuracy and stylisation of the powerful male, together with supreme delicacy and complexity of execution, in a manner that is constitutive to Michelangelo's way of drawing. Michelangelo increases the emotional effect of the work with the way in which Tityus adopts a complicated and balanced posture which runs parallel to the picture plane. This strategy grants centrality to the nude idealised male body and presents the giant in a way that emphatically focuses the attention on the imminent defilement of this beauty. A key component of the work's appeal is that its erotic enticement remains ambiguous in comparison to the *Ganymede* although Michelangelo illuminates in detail Tityus's rippling muscularity and bulk of torso and abdomen. As if almost attempting to compensate for the possibly disagreeable effect of the subject matter it depicts, Michelangelo merges the single elements of beauty and distress as if in equilibrium. Implicit within the drawing is a

sense of unease at the pathos of the prowess, vigour and perfection of the idealised Tityus now being transformed into the ignoble state of debased and vulnerable captive who is about to pay the ultimate price for misdirected lust.

Furthermore, Tommaso is not forced to confront an image of a potentially horrific nature since impending physical indignity and trauma are only hinted at here, not viscerally depicted. In *Tityus*, focus is on punishment for lustful acts and its attendant eternal damnation but Michelangelo's tactic is to offer enough for the viewer to surmise what will happen, rather than depict the barbaric cruelty of the punishment about to ensue. *Tityus* conveys impending peril augmented by the potent sense that this is the intense moment before the inevitable punishment is executed. There is no scarring of the supple abdomen and no clear exposition of pain, whereas in later treatment of the same subject by Titian (1538) and Ribera (1632), the violent savagery of the torment is powerfully stated with dramatic realism (Figs. 70-71). Michelangelo's drawing renders Tityus with an unsullied body before the rapacious bird attacks his liver in a manner that distinguishes him from these later more violent representations. In this way, Michelangelo accomplishes a very direct allusion to the potential for divine punishment but he also avoids presenting his beloved Tommaso with a depiction of the defilement of Tityus's perfect body. To do so would have run counter to his aesthetic principles of rendering beauty in its most idealised and incorrupt form. Furthermore, Tityus is captured at the very moment he turns his head to the executor of his punishment and at the instant he realises his fate. Tityus looks at the bird, not at the viewer, and is depicted almost as if too overpowered by his fate to realise the audience's presence. Michelangelo's tactic of redirecting Tityus's glance away from the spectator thus ensures that no emotional perplexity or physical pain is projected directly onto Tommaso as the intended recipient. From Tityus's expression it is not immediately

apparent which emotions run through his mind and his countenance seems to reveal a mixture of bewilderment, resignation and detachment - a gesture that perhaps signifies the essence of Michelangelo's life and an indication that he considered the unbridled lust of *Tityus* as a locus of his own emotions at this time. Indeed, Michelangelo offers up his true feelings about the destruction of unfettered lust in 'Sonnet 105' declaring:

> To the senses belongs not love but unbridled desire,
> which kills the soul; but our love makes our
> friendship perfect here, and even more beyond death
> in paradise.[252]

The visual efficacy of the drawing very much relies on a correspondence between the contrasting responses of sympathy on the one hand for the horror of the circumstances that are to follow, but more powerful still, a condemnation of the act the giant has committed. Tityus's suffering and vulnerability invokes a sense of martyrdom and sacrifice but this sentiment is juxtaposed by the enveloping and threatening eagle with its wings magnificently spread as if, perhaps, alluding to the overpowering attraction of physical beauty and the yielding of earthly desire to the inexorable and avenging power of destructive fate. Furthermore, the way Tityus's outstretched curved form is mirrored by the undulating contours of the bird's extended wings invokes a sense of compositional harmony. With such astute mirroring dynamics of bird and giant, Michelangelo shows tormented and tormentor as if in dialogue. Yet, this synchronizing strategy in turn creates a tension between content and form. The idealised perpetrator of sexual transgression now becomes the beautiful tragic victim of punitive divine retribution who must endure eternal torture for his sins. The beauty that had once been the highest embodiment of life now becomes the focus of death and eternal suffering. This strategy of linking love of beauty in an earthly or profane sense with sin and fear of

[252] Ryan, 'Sonnet 105', 1998, p. 122.

retribution suggests that beauty and its carnal consumption was for Michelangelo an insurmountable obstacle in the conflict between earthly love and the transcendent goal of heavenly piety. Beauty and its temptation into lustful distraction, which he said brought 'a bitter sweetness, a yes-and-no feeling that moves me' was a painful reminder of its threat to salvation.[253]

Considered in this way, it can be argued that Michelangelo's autobiographical representation of one who suffers the plight of unrequited love is projected onto the figure of the tormented Tityus with an intensity of personal revelation. Furthermore, embedded within a narrative of torture and consumption that surely provided meaning and significance for both Tommaso and Michelangelo, the drawing evidently displays a message that warns of a sensual profane passion which feeds upon itself but can never be satisfied. In one of his sonnets for Tommaso, Michelangelo admits that 'terror, closely linked to beauty, feeds my great desire',[254] so it is plausible that Tityus - the defenceless slave of passion - becomes the visual embodiment of Michelangelo's subjection to Tommaso, and symbolises the peril he associated with a forbidden desire which enslaves and corrupts the soul. Erotic appeal has diminished agency in *Tityus* and its character and intensity suggest that Michelangelo had developed a realisation that his physical desires could not move out of the precinct of the mind. The gravity of the scene corresponds to the lamenting tenor of *Sonnet 91* where he further intensifies the parallel between his own life and the torturous enslavement for eternity he embodies in the drawing:

> So that my life may better resist the extreme heat
> that the closing and the opening of your eyes takes
> away and then gives back, those eyes have become

[253] Saslow, 'Sonnet 76', 1991, p. 186.
[254] Saslow, 'Sonnet 241', 1991, p. 407.

> such magnets for me, for my soul, and for all my powers, that Love, perhaps because he's blind, hesitates and trembles and is afraid to kill me. For to penetrate my heart, since I'm in yours and with you, he first would have to pierce your outer parts; thus, so that you won't die along with me, he won't kill me. Oh, what great martyrdom that a deadly pain from which I do not die should double that slow aching of which, if my heart were with me, I'd be free. Oh, give me back to myself, that I may die![255]

In Dante's *Inferno,* Tityus is named as one of the giants hurled by Zeus into Tartarus beneath Mount Etna.[256] Michelangelo further alludes to Dante's epic poem, which allegorises the journey of the soul towards God and describes the recognition and rejection of sin, with several additional modes of symbolism in this drawing. Indeed, according to Dante's schema of sin set down in Cantos 12-17, sodomy is placed at a lower level in Hell than both suicide and homicide. Furthermore, when Michelangelo includes what appears to be a screaming face within the nearby tree trunk in his Tityus drawing he appears to include another allusion to the *Inferno*, where, in Dante's *Second Ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell* (Canto 13), violence to the self is punished in the Forest of Suicides (Fig. 72). Michelangelo's point of reference for this sinister and threatening motif could have been inspired by the point in the narrative where Virgil enters a strange wood filled with black and gnarled trees but although they can hear many cries of suffering cannot see the souls that utter them:

> Not green leaves but of a dusky colour, not smooth boughs but knotty and gnarled, not fruits were there but thorns with poison. Those savage beasts that hold in hate the tilled places between Cecina and Corneto have no thickets so rough or so dense.
>
> Here the foul Harpies make their nests, who chased the Trojans from the Strophades with dismal announcement of future calamity. They have broad

[255] Saslow, 'Sonnet 91', 1991, p.214.
[256] Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Robin Kirkpatrick, London, 2006, Canto XXXI: lines 97-145.

> wings, and human necks and faces, feet with claws,
> and a great feathered belly. They make lament upon
> the strange trees.[257]

Michelangelo visually reiterates the effect of sin upon the possibility of redemption with this tortured head emerging from a gnarled trunk. Within this already fraught narrative of punishment and retribution for sexual transgression in his Tityus subject, Michelangelo adopts a further moralistic and didactic strategy when he includes a very faintly etched nude figure that seems to represent the soul being either sucked into or escaping from the gaping jaw of the screaming tree-bound face. The visual resemblance between the torturing bird and the souls damned for eternity is reiterated by the beak-like nose and claw-like roots of the tree, thus providing a coherent visual link between eternal damnation and the divine facilitator of punishment for sexual transgression or thoughts of suicide. The choice of the myth of a sexually transgressive Tityus, along with the implicit symbolism of suicide and possible suffering for the sin of sodomy, Michelangelo could be articulating fear of the tortuous effects of having his own soul similarly dragged down to the underworld. In would appear, therefore, that the inclusion of such symbolism indicates that he feared that his spiritual providence might suffer eternal horror and anguish in a manner akin to the imprisoned souls of the damned from Dante's *Inferno*. [258]

To expand the scope of this reading, it is useful to consider how, unlike *Ganymede*, *Tityus* is not only a matter of emotion; it is intended to have a moralising effect when it speaks to both the vulnerability of Tityus and to the source of divine punitive power. In offering a moment of tension, of imminent action and the

[257] Ibid, Canto XIII.
[258] Punishment of the sin of suicide and sodomy appears in Canto XIII and Canto XVI of *Inferno* respectively.

anticipation of acute pain Tityus plausibly finds a correspondence with Michelangelo's emotional turmoil in his poetry. The intensity and self-reflection of *Tityus* is quite consonant with the sentiments expressed in *Sonnet 260*:

> For separated from you, I seem to sink so low that love deprives and strips me of all strength; so when I think of lessening my sufferings he, doubling them, threatens me with death. It is useless, then, for me to spur on my flight, doubling the pace at which I fly from hostile beauty, for the less speedy never gains distance on one who moves more swiftly. Love with his own hands dries my eyes, promising that I shall hold all effort dear: for he who costs so much cannot himself be base.[259]

My analysis of the very faint depiction of the crab sheltering under a rock rests on a fundamental basis that throughout Michelangelo's oeuvre he generally eschews extraneous details and that it is possible to apply meaning and expression to almost every element in his work (Fig. 73). As Saslow remarks, the artist 'projected himself into everything he did',[260] and indeed, Michelangelo himself declares in a sonnet for Tommaso that 'I draw out of it what is suitable and similar to me'.[261] On the basis that this drawing is devoid of other obvious superfluous elements, it therefore seems plausible that metaphorical potency could also be attached to this obscure crab.

One explanation for the presence of this crab may perhaps be found in another allegorical mythological source where the virtues of strength, determination and fortitude overcome potential distraction and adversity. According to the *Bibliotheca* by the second-century Greek mythographer Pseudo-Apollodorus, the constellation of cancer was created by Hercules when he battled with the crab Karkinos during the second of his Twelve Labours. Before Hercules slayed the multi-headed Hydra called

[259] Ryan, 'Sonnet No.260', 1998, p. 123.
[260] Saslow, 1991, p. 5.
[261] Saslow, 'Sonnet 84', 1991, p. 197.

Hera, she sent the crab to distract him and put him at a disadvantage during the battle. However, Hercules kicked the crab with great force and propelled it into the sky:

> For his second labour Herakles was instructed to slay the Lernaian Hydra. The beast was nurtured in the marshes of Lerna . . . [Herakles attacked her and] she hung on to him by wrapping herself round one of his feet, and he was unable to help matters by striking her with his club, for as soon as one head was pounded off two others would grow in its place. Then a giant crab came along to help the Hydra, and bit Herakles on the foot. For this he killed the crab and Juno [Hera] put it among the constellations. [262]

An alternative but more speculative interpretation is that the crab may be a meaningful indicator of the artist's self-conception as someone who is emotionally vulnerable and in need of protection against his true desires for Tommaso. Just as a crab has a protective exoskeleton, Michelangelo could be a referencing the need for guarding his private emotions and insecurities within his own shell by showing only his hard armoured outer casing and concealing his inner susceptibility to those desires. Michelangelo may be also implying here that he seeks divine protection for the spiritual path on which feels he has to embark. Furthermore, the crab's cyclical shedding and regeneration of this hard exterior as it grows could be alluding to the power of spiritual rebirth and development. It is also possible that by including a crab which has a sideways ambulatory nature, but is known to persevere with tenacity and determination, Michelangelo could be admitting that he too has not always taken the most direct route to salvation. Also, when we consider that the grip from a crab's clinging claw can be restricting and excruciating, this could be also interpreted as Michelangelo's

[262] Pseudo-Apollodorus, cited in R. Smith and S. M. Trzaskoma, (eds.), *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology*, Indianapolis, 2007, pp. xxii–xxiii.

acknowledgement that trying to hold on to something unobtainable for too long is painful to one's self or others.

Such readings of *Tityus* as Michelangelo's quest for the triumph of morality over harsh sexual reality take on an even greater weight when we examine the *Doni Tondo* (1506) in which five cavorting ambiguous nude male figures are placed behind the Holy Family (Fig. 74). The presence of these nude adolescent boys has prompted vastly different interpretations, but it is quite probable that their provocative sensuality signifies the essence of Michelangelo's fear of immoral behaviour.[263] Kenneth Clark was one of the first art historians to construe this erotically interacting group of nudes as the manifestation of his temporal preoccupation with the potential consequences of sexual longing: 'Michelangelo thought that there was nothing more beautiful than a naked young man, and that, since beauty was an attribute of God, it was quite appropriate to place them between God's work and his witnesses… These figures are part of an imperative dream which he had been forced to externalize (most inappropriately) in the background of the *Doni Tondo*'. [264] It is plausible that these sensual nude adolescents were intended as a fitting visual embodiment of the lust that compromised the faith to which Michelangelo was profoundly dedicated. This is also the opinion of Mirella Levi d'Ancona who also contends that these figures could indeed be interpreted as symbolising the destructive sinful impulse of male desire: 'of what uncleanliness the waiting men must be purified is shown by the gestures of those on the right. Michelangelo - who is rumoured to have been familiar with this sin (or should we speak, like Ficino, of disease?) … Now we understand that Michelangelo meant them to be an integral part of the concept of salvation conveyed

[263] A more conservative interpretation which reads these figures as embodying the importance of baptism can be found in C. Franceschini, 'The Nudes in Limbo: Michelangelo's "Doni Tondo" Reconsidered', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 73, 2010, pp. 137-180.
[264] K. Clarke, 'Michelangelo Pittore', *Apollo*, 80, 1964, p. 440.

by every other part of the painting. After all, there would be no need for salvation if there were no sinners'.[265] Critical for our understanding of the manner in which *Tityus* embodies Michelangelo's conflicting emotional anxieties is his visual distinction between the nude adolescent same sex couples in his *Doni Tondo* who seem to symbolise carnal sin of male sexual behaviour and the holy sacrament of marriage that is characterized in that of Mary and Joseph. In my opinion, the homoerotic tenor of the male nudes in the *Doni Tondo* both reinforces and clarifies the themes of carnal transgression and the quest for salvation we find in the *Tityus* drawing. This viewpoint is supported by the way in which there may be embedded pictorially within *Tityus* a number of concerns at the core of Michelangelo's thinking about the torturous effect of sinful desire on his soul. Leonardo stated that 'every painter paints himself '.[266] In this regard, the drawing can be considered as Michelangelo's visual documentation of his fear that to offend divine powers with sexual sin makes the perpetrator vulnerable to terrible consequences which he then symbolised with Tityus's eternal and hideous suffering and further extolled in his poetry.

Verso Sketch of '*The Risen Christ*'

It is possible to see Michelangelo's *Tityus* as the response to feelings of deserved punishment which existed within his mind alongside a need for divine salvation even more clearly when we examine what he did with the reverse of the sheet. Here there is a roughly drawn sketch of a figure which has been widely identified as the resurrected Christ emerging from the tomb (Fig. 75). To the left is a secondary male figure with

[265] M. L. d'Ancona, 'The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo', *Art Bulletin*, 50, 1968, p. 47. This interpretation is cited in Tolnay, 1975, p. 19; Saslow, 1999, p. 97; Wallace, 1998, p. 137; Hibbard, 174, p. 318. Also see J. Manca, 'Sacred vs. Profane: Images of Sexual Vice in Renaissance Art', *Studies in Iconography* 13, 1989-90, pp. 145-90.
[266] See M. Kemp. 'Ogni Pittore Dipinge Sé: A Neoplatonic Echo in Leonardo's Art Theory?' in C. H. Clough (ed.), *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance*, Manchester, 1976.

raised arms (Fig. 76). These figures on the verso of the *Tityus* sheet are identified as *The Risen Christ and Study of a Figure* in the Courtauld's exhibition catalogue and are classified by this appellation in the Royal Collection, Windsor.[267] Both Christ and the secondary figure are in a forward facing pose with heads rotated to their right, although Christ has a downward gaze and that of the secondary figure is directed upward. The composition fills the upper two thirds of the sheet with the lower section devoid of any detail. The vertical figure of Christ is centrally placed and on a similar scale of the secondary figure. Christ is presented as if beginning his ascent to heaven with His left leg extended and left arm flexed slightly and pointing skyward. Christ's other outstretched right arm is lowered with an open hand positioned above His flexed and raised right leg. The less detailed secondary figure is seated with his left leg crossed over the right above the knee. Both figures have been rendered with muscular bodies and powerful physiques but only Christ's genitals are depicted. There are no visible signs of the wounds and no clear exposition of emotion or pain on the physiognomies of either figure.

Although there is general acceptance that this verso drawing is indeed *The Risen Christ*, scholarly debates endure on the question of the chronological sequence of the verso and recto of the *Tityus* sheet. Largely on the basis that Michelangelo was known to reuse paper, both Barkan and Hartt opine that this sketch of the *Risen Christ* was executed first and was then traced to provide the outline for the *Tityus*.[268] This assumption has not received much support, and the most common opinion is that the

[267] Buck, 2010, p. 111. The identification of the verso figure as *The Risen Christ* is agreed upon by Perrig, 1960, pp. 76-77; Wallace, 1983, p. 133; Barkan, 1991, pp. 90-92, and others.
[268] See Barkan, 1991, pp. 90-1.Without providing an explanation for his claim, Hartt theorises that the *Risen Christ* predates *Tityus* by fifteen years in his *Drawings of Michelangelo*, New York, 1970, pp. 138-40, 249-50. Hartt's dating to c.1512 lacks convincing argument, as Hirst points out in *Michelangelo and his Drawings*, 1988, p. 98.

outline of the helpless recumbent figure of Tityus has been traced and rotated by 45 degrees, thus transforming the figure into one of Christ.[269] In so doing, these two drawings become polar opposites where the Saviour destined for heaven on the verso is set against the sinner tortured for eternity in the pagan underworld. Alexander Perrig, however, regards the *pentimenti* in the contouring of the figure of Christ and its presumed conceptual weaknesses as the work of a less accomplished draughtsman. [270] After first attributing the verso sketch to Sebastiano Del Piombo but without explanation on how the work would have been accessible to this artist,[271] Perrig later suggested that the second draughtsman was Tommaso de'Cavalieri who, as the recipient of the work, would have been the only person other than Michelangelo who could have used the sheet in such a manner.[272] Perrig's assessment is, to my mind, implausible given the fact that, as William Wallace notes, the sketch of the *Risen Christ* does not show through on the other side of the paper, whereas the more defined graphics of *Tityus* are visible on the verso and show signs of wear. Secondly, the verso is executed in charcoal not black chalk which is a medium that lends itself more easily to erasure and correction.[273] Furthermore, Michael Hirst argues that this suggestion does not take into account Michelangelo's extraordinary creativity manifest in 'transforming the mythological victim into a resurrected Christ' rising in triumphant ascension from his tomb.[274] Indeed as Hirst notes, Sebastiano del Piombo himself commented on how his friend Michelangelo demonstrated his skill of turning another version of *Ganymede* into a now lost Saint John the Evangelist also ascending to heaven.[275] However, the most

[269] Buck, 2010, pp. 111-6.
[270] For an informative account on Renaissance drawing practice see C. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600*, Cambridge, 1999.
[271] Perrig, 1960, pp. 24-8
[272] Perrig, 1991, pp. 76-7.
[273] W. E. Wallace, *Studies in Michelangelo's Finished Drawings* 1520-1534, New York, 1983, p. 133.
[274] M. Hirst, *Michelangelo Draughtsman*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1988, p. 103.
[275] Hirst, *Michelangelo and his Drawings*, 1988, p. 113.

convincing evidence for attribution of the verso to Michelangelo himself lies with how both the Christ and the second figure lifting his arms to heaven bear close iconographical and stylistic links with the artist's study for *The Resurrection*, also executed in 1533 (Fig. 77). These parallels root the tracing of the *Risen Christ* on the verso of *Tityus* firmly within Michelangelo's corpus and supports attribution to the master, thus refuting the occasional doubts that have been voiced as to the direct authorship of the verso of the sheet.

We may indeed question whether a drawing on reused paper would have been considered suitable to be given to someone Michelangelo so highly valued, particularly when the drawings were intended to be presented as an expression of his regard for the man he dearly loved. It is, to my mind, more credible that Michelangelo had deliberate intentions when he executed these two drawings for Tommaso. Moreover, there seems to have been careful anatomical study for Tityus's body which has its twisted torso and chest pressed onto the rock in a way that produces an extreme but logical curve which is absent in the body of the resurrected Christ. It is considerably more plausible that the master used the image of Christ leaping free of his tomb and the bondage of life on earth on the verso of the sheet to reaffirm in a didactically assertive manner his profound sense of guilt over the deplorable inclination of the flesh, and perhaps also express his conviction that the fate of an eternal hell can be staved off if one turns to Christ the Redeemer who triumphs over evil. Given Michelangelo's profound spirituality, together with the fact that this aspect of allegorical importance is religious in form**,** it seems implausible that this pious man would have considered converting Christ into the sinner Tityus as anything less that blasphemy, whereas, to transform Tityus into an image of the Saviour would have been in the spirit of redemption. Read in this way, the verso image of the triumphant Christ emerging from the tomb in a

glorious gesture that irrevocably leaves death and suffering behind could be seen as Michelangelo's visualisation of the need to ward off the horror of eternal damnation.

The likelihood that the *Tityus* was executed first is further upheld when we examine how this same conceptualising emphasis of transforming a sinner suffering in hell into the figure of Christ reappears in Michelangelo's later work. This redemptive motif recurred later in 1547 for the Florence *Pietà* (Fig. 78). Here, it appears that the master used as his principal inspiration for his figure of Christ a sinner being subjected to a hideous fate in hell from Lorenzo Maitani's bas-relief of the *Last Judgement* (1325) on the façade of the Duomo in Orvieto (Fig. 79).[276] Michelangelo's sculpted figure of the sinking Christ supported by Nicodemus in the Florence *Pietà* group is the mirror image of Maitani's tormented sinner who collapses with the same bent knees, slumped head and curved alignment of the torso. This visual connection prompts one to conclude that Michelangelo not only appropriates and modulates the basic pose of the sinner in *Tityus* to create the *Risen Christ* for the verso but that he repeats this exercise twenty-five years later when he transforms the sinner from the Orvieto cathedral's fourteenth-century façade of the *Last Judgement* to create a Christ figure once more for the Florence *Pietà.* Michelangelo's visualisation of punishment administered by non-human means is fortified by a further analogous connection between Maitani's sinner in hell who is presented at the moment he surrenders to the prospect of being devoured by an enslaving serpent and the giant Tityus who is depicted at the point when retribution is about to be administered by eternal consumption of his liver by a capturing eagle. What has been said so far indicates that self-reflective evocations of conflict, anguish and fear of retribution for sexual yielding supply the dynamic of both Michelangelo's *Tityus* and

[276] See F. Hartt, *The Complete Sculpture Of Michelangelo*, New York, 1968.

his written output at this stage in his relationship with Tommaso. But ultimately, the question of why Michelangelo felt that his physical desires were vulnerable to or deserving of damnation is pivotal to the understanding of the conceptual framework within which *Tityus* and its companion drawings were produced and interpreted. The answer is determined by many factors, but essential to constructing this connection between the pictorial vocabulary of Michelangelo's presentation drawings and his philosophical, theological and social concerns is an understanding of the centrality of Christian morality to early modern sensibilities, along with a grasp of the social formation with which sexual behaviour was constructed at this time. The meanings of Michelangelo's works for Tommaso are bound to their context and reception which may be better understood through a reconstruction of the history of anti-sodomitic fear and hostility. The basis for this religious and moral reprobation was partly theological and partly ecclesiastical in character but it is evident that erotic desire constituted a significant problem for Christian thinkers from the first century onwards.

Historical Context

If we are to attempt to understand the conception of *Tityus* and its companion drawings, then the condemnatory discourse that emerges from the sermons of patristic theologians and clerical polemicists necessarily commands a place of special prominence at this juncture. Michelangelo conceived these works in the aftermath of Savonarola's fervent campaign against sodomy at the end of the fifteenth century. This intensity of anti-sodomitic emotion that charged the socio-spiritual climate of Renaissance Italy under the Savonarola theocracy ensured that social and political order were completely identified with religious order and, therefore, any dissent with or departure from the spiritual code of sexual behaviour amounted to social subversion. As Ruggiero states:

'sodomy threatened to undermine the basic organisational units of society – family, male-female bonding, reproduction – which struck at the heart of social self-perception. Fornication with nuns certainly hurt God, but sodomy destroyed society with or without his wrath. Sodomy must have been seen as such an upset of the natural order'.[277] Savonarola's denunciation, however, was far from well received by some and upon his demise in 1497 a magistrate infamously exclaimed 'praise be god, we can now go sodomise!'[278]

The religious zeal and censure of Savonarola's fierce tirades, together with the powerful influence of his *Ufficiali di Notte* upon the fears and imagination of those whose desires were directed toward other males, would have played a considerable part in forming the moral traditions and ideals that Michelangelo would have inherited. Savonarola preached that sex was an activity which prevented a true Christian from the achievement of sanctity and he ensured that the scope and scale of sodomy's prosecution made it a public affair.[279] Savonarola uncompromisingly forbade male same sex erotic acts with exaggerated vehemence and his sermons boomed forth with citation from both the Bible and canon law. The friar evinced severe punishment with acid denouncements of what he perceived as a detested sin with commands such as 'Good government is punishing the evil ones and getting sodomites and the wicked out of your city'[280]. In one of his 1494 sermons Savonarola condemns sodomy in pervasive critical parlance when he commands citizens to 'abandon your pomp and your banquets and sumptuous meals. Abandon, I tell you, your concubines and your beardless youths.

[277] Ruggiero, 1985, pp. 109-10.
[278] Quoted by R. Ridolfi, *Vita Del Savonarola*, 2 vols. Rome, 1952, p. 261.
[279] For an account of Savonarola and his sermons see L. Martines, *Savonarola and Renaissance Florence: Scourge and Fire*, London, 2006.
[280] G. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, 1:28 (May 6 1496), ed. V. Romano, 2 Vols, Rome, 1971, p. 525.

Abandon, I say, that unspeakable vice, abandon that abominable vice that has brought God's wrath upon you, or else: woe, woe to you!'[281] Savonarola's oppressive religious and moral assumptions were founded on the decisive biblical authority for censuring the sexual conduct of men which can be found in Leviticus: 'Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination' (xviii.22), also 'if a man lie with mankind as with womankind, both of them have committed abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them' (xx.13). In the New Testament there is little mention of sexual acts between males but in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (1:26-27) he condemns unnatural sexual behavior and warns that such acts will result in a depraved body and mind: 'the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error'.

If we examine other theological factors which have contributed to the formation of Renaissance attitudes to sexual practices between males we find evidence that early Christian ecclesiastical writers and canon law also constructed a heavy legacy of taboo on this matter.[282] There is little evidence of widespread prosecution for sodomy until the thirteenth century although such acts were denounced on the grounds that they were unnatural by several early Church Fathers.[283] The most notable pronouncement upon the subject of sexual practices between males was from Augustine of Hippo (354- 430) who contends in his *Confessions* that such acts were transgressions against God's command, declaring that: 'those shameful acts against nature, such as were committed in Sodom, ought everywhere and always to be detested and punished. If all nations were to do such

[281] P. Villari and E. Casanova, *Scelte di prediche e scritti da Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, Florence, 1898, pp. 61-3.
[282] For a historic perspective on the condemnation of sodomy, see Goodich, 1979, p. 7. Also see D. Sherwin Baily, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition,* London, 1955.
[283] J. J. McNeil, *The Church and the Homosexual*, Boston, 1993.

things, they would equally be held guilty of the same crime by the law of God, which has not so made men that they should use each other in this way'.[284] Basil of Caesarea (329-79) was another fourth-century doctor of the Church whose treatise preached: 'If thou art young in either body or mind, shun the company of other young men and avoid them as thou wouldest a flame. For through them the enemy has kindled the desires of many and then handed them over to eternal fire, hurling them into the vile pit of the five cities under the pretence of spiritual love'.[285]

Persecution of sodomy was fairly episodic until the medieval period. During the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) was the only great scholastic theologian to discuss the subject of erotic same-sex behaviour in any detail. Pronouncing on the cardinal virtues of temperance in his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas says:

> In each kind of thing the worst corruption is the corruption of the principle on which other things depend. Now the principles of reason are the things in accord in nature… and therefore, to act against what is determined by nature, is most serious and base. Therefore since in the sins against nature man transgress what is determined by nature in regard to sex, the sin in this matter is the gravest kind of sin. After this is incest… while by the other species of lust one transgresses only that which is determined according to right reason, but presupposing the natural principles. But it is more contrary to reason to have sex not only contrary to the good of the offspring to be born, but also with injury to another. And therefore simple fornication, which is committed without injury to another person, is the least kind of lust.[286]

[284] Augustine, *Confessiones*, III, VII, in H. Chadwick, *The Confessions of Augustine*. Oxford, 2008, p. 152.
[285] Basil of Caesarea, cited in W. K. L. Clarke, trans., *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, London, 1925, p. 66.
[286] T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae; Treatise on Law* , II-II, q. 154, a. 12, ed. and trans., A. C. Pegis, New York, 1945.

Aquinas counts sodomy third on the list of ways to commit unnatural vice. The other forms of unnatural vice are 'by procuring pollution without any copulation', 'by copulating with a thing of undue species (bestiality), and 'by not observing the natural manner of copulation, as to either undue means, or as to other monstrous and bestial manners of copulation'.[287] The philosopher Peter of Abano (1239-1316) also assailed sodomy in the fourteenth century:

> Those who exercise the wicked act of sodomy by rubbing the penis in the hand; others by rubbing between the thighs of boys, which is what most do these days; and others by making friction around the anus and putting the penis in it the same way as it is placed in a woman's sexual part.[288]

These historical texts on the subject of sodomy are indispensable as a lexicon of received and inherited period values since they show that the Church clearly regarded sexual practices between men and boys or with one another with unqualified disapproval. However, the sexual standards that were enunciated failed to eradicate the forbidden tendencies and outlawed behaviour even within the clergy, as this poem by a fourteenth-century Veronese cleric reveals:

> Stones from the substance of hard earth material, he threw o'er his shoulder who made men supremely; one of those stones is that boy who disdainfully scorns the entreaties I utter, ah, painfully! Joy that was mine is my rival's tomorrow, while I for my fawn like a stricken deer sorrow! [289]

The fifteenth century, however, marked an influential pivot in the formation of religious opinion and control of sexual practices. During this doctrinally confident age the primary and most authoritative instructor was the preacher who often used his

[287] T. Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 43, 2a2ae.154, ii, p. 245.
[288] J. Cadden, 'Sciences / Silences; The Natures And Languages of Sodomy in Peter of Abano's *Problemata* Commentary' in K. Lochrie, P. McCracken and J.A. Scultz, (eds.), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 50.
[289] E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, New York, 1953, p. 114.

oratory and intellectual virtuosity to wield considerable social and political power with visions for an ideal Christian theocracy.[290] The most contemptuous denunciator of sodomy at this time was Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) who expressed himself with particular force on the subject of sexual acts committed by men with other men, stating: 'Sodomy is a custom in all of Tuscany. Go ahead, justify yourself with this excuse that it's a custom...You will abandon it only when the devil carries you off.'[291] Bernardino used his social role and the power of eloquent rhetoric in an arena of formal public oratory to convey his position of intransient absolutism on 'this sin against nature'[292] with disdain:

> Isn't there a sodomite here who dislikes this, and says that woman isn't worth as much as a man? ... We shall speak here of the accursed sodomites, who are so blind in this wickedness of theirs that no matter how beautiful a woman may be, to him she stinks and is displeasing, nor will he ever yield to her beauty. [293]

Bernardino's extensive and vivid sermons on what he called 'the abominable sin of accursed sodomy' were delivered with a thunderous energy, vehemence and vigour of invective which exacerbated a climate of anti-sodomitic fear and hostility in fifteenth-century Italy.[294] The preacher's concern that sodomy was no rare occurrence was declared with some degree of irony in one sermon where he declared that 'the young boys who do not allow themselves to be contaminated by the sodomites ought to be canonized as saints'.[295] In another sermon, Bernardino goes so far as to lay blame for

[290] M. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, Chicago and London, 1997. Also see M. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, Minneapolis, 1998.
[291] Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche* (Florence, 1425), 2:116, cited in F. Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, 1999, p. 171.
[292] Bernardino of Siena, *Opera Omnia*, 9 vols. Quaracchi: Collegio San Bonaventura, 1950-65, III.267-84 cited in Mormando, 1999, p. 304, n. 179.
[293] Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche* (Siena, 1425), 2:105, cited in Rocke, 1991, p. 41.
[294] Bernardino of Siena, *Opera Omnia*, III.319-29, cited in Mormando, 1999, p. 144.
[295] Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari* (Florence 1424), 1142, cited in Mormando, 1999, p. 141.

the omnipresence of sodomy at the feet of mothers who he singles out as emasculators of their sons through feminising indulgence and maternal excess: 'Oh you women, it is you who turn your sons into sodomites! When you send them outdoors, make sure you polish them up good! To the house of the Devil, all of you – you are the cause of much evil. *Oimmé, oimmé!* Don't you see that you are acting like pimps?'[296]

Artists often respond to the society of which they are a part in particular ways and the manner in which they operated within the parameters of the period's moral paradigms is of considerable consequence for assessing Renaissance attitudes to the subject of sodomy and its vilification by the Church. Taddeo di Bartolo's *Last Judgement* fresco (c.1393-1413) in the Collegiata at San Gimignano provides an example of how sexual imagery was used as a means of pictorial chastisement against sodomy in a visual context (Fig. 80). The shaping ideals of Bernardino's vitriolic preaching find a precedent in this fresco where the sexual nature of the sin being punished is unequivocal. Here a devil is depicted penetrating a tethered naked male figure with a rod which enters through his anus and exits his mouth. The skewered sinner wears a papal mitre bearing the accusation *SOTOMITTO* and is posed in a sexually submissive position as he is roasted on a bed of coals whilst other blue demons apply further punishments to his body. In an allusion to fellatio, a younger seated protagonist receives the rod emerging from the sinner in his open mouth. This visual reference to pigs and the spit-roasting of sodomites in Taddeo's fresco reoccurs in a contemporaneous Perugian fourteenth-century text: 'You cursed sodomites who have sinned against nature roast like sucking pigs! Zabrin, let this remedy be followed, fire up the furnace well and give the roast a good turning'.[297] The general ecclesiastical

[296] Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena* (Siena 1427), 1151, cited in Rocke, 1999, p. 42.
[297] *Laude Drammatiche e Rappresentazioni Sacre*, trans. V. De Bartholomaeis, Florence, 1943, p. 52.

opinion regarding the condemnation of sodomy finds further pictorial alignment in Luca Signorelli's *Last Judgement* (1499-02) fresco for the Brizio chapel in Orvieto's cathedral (Fig. 81). In this scene of damnation, several demons torment the sinners as they descend into hell but central import is given to one sinner whose green decaying buttocks are foregrounded in a pointed allusion to the degrading effect of such debased activity. These images afford us an ample window onto the visual rendition of sodomy and its punishment and illustrate how the Church ensured that divine retribution for committing this perceived vice occupied most people's minds and imaginations in fifteenth-century Italy.

The judiciary evidence that we have concerning prosecution for sodomy in Renaissance Florence indicates that many problems were caused by conflicts between doctrine and practice and that the Church's stance was never totally accepted. This suggests that theory and sexual behaviour often diverged despite clerical wrath and uncompromising condemnation. Detailed examination of reasons for the void which existed between the sexual behaviour of males toward each other and the Church's absolute intransient dogma is beyond the scope of this study. However, the act of confession may well have been a factor that made illicit and non-procreative sexual acts deemed contrary to puritanical theological directives less of a prohibitive obstacle. As Foucault states, the dominance of the rite of confession in Christian experience was pivotal to most perceived sexual sinners:

> Confession, the examination of conscience, all of the insistence on the secrets and the importance of the flesh, was not simply a means of forbidding sex or of pushing it as far as possible from consciousness, it was a way of placing sexuality at the heart of existence and of connecting salvation to the mastery of sexuality's obscure movements. Sex was, in Christian societies, that which had to be examined,

> watched over, confessed and transformed into discourse.[298]

A focus which informs much scholarship on Michelangelo, and indeed the concerns of this chapter, is the manner in which his spirituality was absolutely germane to his life. The ecclesiastical legislation and pictorial condemnation which we have reviewed so far reflects a legacy of attitudes on the perceived sexual sin of sodomy and shows what steps were taken to deter offenders by imposing spiritual punishments. It is my contention that, in addition to biblical authority, the manner in which sexual practices between males was theologically and ecclesiastically regarded as reprehensible is an important key to understanding how Michelangelo's presentation drawings were historically imbricated within the religious constraints and moral proscriptions of his time. Not least significantly, these biblical texts, sermons and invectives are formal grounds to explain how Michelangelo's preoccupation with sexual transgression and divine retribution in his work connects with a reflection about not only his personal conceptual framework within which *Tityus* and its companion drawings were produced and interpreted but also the moralist ideals and religious concerns of Renaissance society itself.

If our understanding of Michelangelo's inner conflict about physical desire is enriched by the above evidence confirming that contemporary culture dictated that he eradicated such feelings, then close interrogation of his *The Fall of Phaeton* has similar potential for elucidating how Michelangelo's choice of a very particular narrative representing divine intervention and deliverance forms another facet of the pictorial tradition he adopts for these presentation drawings for Tommaso. The arguments

[298] M. Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self' in J. R. Carrette, (ed.), *Religion And Culture; Michel Foucault*, New York, 1999, pp. 169-81.

presented consistently throughout this chapter have aimed to encourage a re-evaluation of *The Rape of Ganymede*, *The Punishment of Tityus* and *The Fall of Phaeton* as a tripartite suite where Michelangelo makes manifest visually his developing fears and emotions regarding the cause, effect and consequences he associated with his love for Tommaso. Certainly through the above analysis of *Ganymede* and *Tityus*, together with a selection of his sonnets, it becomes clear Michelangelo was contemplating, addressing and articulating, pictorially and in text, some of his most deeply felt personal emotions. The final sheet in this unfolding dialogue addressing the complex issues of desire, death and retribution is the complex and didactic *The Fall of Phaeton*.

The Fall of Phaeton

There are three sketches of *The Fall of Phaeton* and attribution of all three to Michelangelo is generally accepted, but this chapter centres on the more worked up sheet now in the Royal Collection, Windsor (Fig. 82).[299] This complex composition was received by Tommaso in September 1533, and its place as the final drawing within a sequence of three *Phaeton* versions by Michelangelo is widely accepted. Two other preliminary *modelli*, now in Venice's Gallerie dell'Accademia and the British Museum, are also extant (Figs. 83-84).[300] The existence of autographical inscriptions secures the attribution of these unfinished sketches also but the sequence of their execution is a matter of dispute.[301] The British Museum version appears to have been submitted to Tommaso for his approval as there is a quote inscribed in Michelangelo's hand at the

[299] This study is not mentioned in Vasari's 1550 edition of *Lives* but is referred to as a gift made to Tommaso by Michelangelo in the 1568 edition.
[300] The Venice version has a scarcely legible autograph message to Tommaso stating; 'I drew this as well as I know, therefore I am sending yours back because I am your servant that I will redraw it another time', see Hartt, 1971, p. 250. The existence of this inscription supports the likelihood that Michelangelo proposed another final version which he then completed in September 1533 and that this is the more accomplished and highly finished Windsor sheet.
[301] See Panofsky, 1939, p. 219; Hartt, 1971, vol.2, p. 382; Hirst, 1988, p.110; Perrig, 1991, p. 39.

bottom of the sheet offering to make another if not to his friend's taste: 'Messer Tommaso, if this sketch does not please you, say so to Urbino in time for me to do another tomorrow evening, as I promised you, and if it pleases you and you wish me to finish it, send it back to me'.[302] The fact that this was intended as a preliminary sketch is not only upheld by Michelangelo's anticipation that a replacement would only take a single day but also how he refers to this British Museum version as a '*schizzo*'. This version was later subjected to radical revision in the equally unfinished Venice version of the theme and the later completed Windsor drawing that was presented in the summer of 1533. I have selected this latter version as my case study because it is the most highly finished and elaborately detailed of all three and has a greater degree of technical and compositional refinement as well as a more sophisticated character in terms of form and content.

Classical Textual Sources and Pictorial Precedents

According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Phaeton was the son of Apollo and the Oceanid Clymene. Phaeton's best friend and lover was Cygnus, the king of Liguria. Phaeton seeks assurance that his mother, Clymene, is speaking the truth with her claim that his father is the sun god Apollo, and not her husband Merops, a mortal king. Phaeton went to his father who swore by the river Styx to give Phaeton anything he should ask for in order to confirm this was true. Phaeton wanted to drive his chariot of the sun for a day to prove his divine ancestry. Apollo tried to talk him out of it by telling him that not even Zeus, the king of gods, would dare to drive it as the chariot was fiery hot and the horses breathed out flames but Phaeton was adamant. When the day came, Apollo anointed Phaeton's head with magic oil to keep the chariot from burning him.

[302] Buck, 2010, p. 125.

Nevertheless, Phaeton was unable to control the fierce horses that drew the chariot as they sensed a weaker hand. Once the Earth became in danger of burning up, and rivers and lakes began to evaporate, Poseidon rose out of the sea and waved his trident in anger at the sun, but soon the heat became even too great for him and he dove to the bottom of the ocean. Eventually, Zeus was forced to intervene by striking the runaway chariot with a lightning bolt to stop it, and Phaethon plunged into the river Eridanos. Apollo, stricken with grief, refused to drive his chariot for days until the other Greek gods persuaded him not to leave the world in darkness. Apollo blamed Zeus for killing his son, but Zeus insisted that there was alternative solution. Phaeton's three sisters, the Heliades, Phaethusa, Lampetia, and Aetheria, wept for four months so the despairing gods turned them into poplar trees and their tears into amber which fell into the river Eridanus in which Phaethon had fallen. Phaeton's friend and lover Cygnus was transformed into a swan. The voluminous story of Phaeton occupies over four-hundred lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1,750-79; II, 1-380), but the salient extracts read as follows:

> The father's warning ended; yet he fought against the words, and urged his first request, burning with desire to drive the chariot… the horses hasten of their own accord; the hard task is to check their eager feet…the driver is panic-stricken, he knows not how to handle the reins entrusted to him, nor where the road is; nor, if he did know, would he be able to control the steeds. Then for the first time the cold oxen grew hot with the rays of the sun, and tried, though all in vain, to plunge into the forbidden sea…Now they climb up to the top of heaven, and now, plunging headlong down, they course along nearer the earth… Then indeed does Phaeton see the earth aflame on every hand; he cannot endure the mighty heat…So spoke the Earth and ceased, for she could no longer endure the heat; and she retreated into herself…[Zeus] thundered and balancing in his right hand a bolt, flung it from beside the ear at the

> charioteer and hurled him from the car and from life as well, and thus quenched fire with blasting fire.
>
> Clymene, after she had spoken whatever could be spoken in such woe, wandered over the whole earth…The Heliades, her daughters, join in her lamentation, and pour out their tears in useless tribute to the dead. Then one day the eldest, Phaethusa, when she would throw herself upon the grave, complained that her feet had grown cold and stark; and when the fair Lampetia tried to come to her, she was held fast as by sudden roots. A third, making to tear her hair, found her hands plucking at foliage… Cycnus, the son of Sthenelus, was a witness of this miracle. Thou he was kin to you, O Phaeton, by his mother's blood, he was more closely joined in affection…So Cycnus became a strange new bird-the swan. Then Apollo yokes his team again, wild and trembling still with fear; and in his grief, fiercely plies them with lash and goad, reproaching and taxing them with the death of his son.[303]

Michelangelo's drawing assumes a precise knowledge of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* while the principles and genesis of its form and subject point to a possible relation with a Roman sarcophagus portraying the same Phaeton myth which was discovered in the fifteenth century behind the Church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Rome and is now in the Uffizi (Fig. 85).[304] In all likelihood, Michelangelo would have been familiar with this sarcophagus which was situated near Tommaso's residence, but he may also have been acquainted with a reproduction from a now lost sketchbook from Ghirlandaio's workshop known as the *Codex Escurialensis*.[305] As will be contended in detail later, a similar external referent could also be the stucco *War* panel from the Palazzo Scala in

[303] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book 2, p. 64-5.
[304] De Tolney, III, p. 294.
[305] H. Egger, *Codex Escurialensis*, Vienna 1906.

Florence which was executed in c.1480 for the esteemed Medicean chancellor Bartolomeo Scala (Fig. 86).[306]

Description

The composition is pyramidal with a muscular nude Zeus mounted astride an eagle as he hurls a thunderbolt downward at its apex. The bird's attention is turned towards Zeus's groin and its wings and feet are both spread (Fig. 87). The pair are positioned on and surrounded by cloud formations. Directly beneath and at the centre of the composition, a timber two-wheeled chariot tilts towards the picture plane as it expels a tumbling nude athletic Phaeton accompanied by four entangled horses with heads facing downwards and splayed legs (Fig. 88). The physique and pose of Phaeton recalls that of both the Ganymede and Tityus figures who share similar flexed knees, extended legs and lines of torsion. Phaeton's inverted position is unified with that of these beasts as he too is depicted hurtling towards the ground with his arms above his head and his legs splayed. The inverted genitalia of both Phaeton and the central horse are prominent. The horses have an expression of panic but there is no exposition of emotion to be discerned in Phaeton. The human figures and horses are elaborately worked but the landscape and spiralling clouds are more faintly etched. Positioned vertically beneath this mêlée of falling beasts, man and chariot in the lowest register are five nude figures and a swan with partially extended wings (Fig. 89). Three standing female Heliades all look skyward with alarmed expressions; two of whom have hands clasped in panic but one at the bottom right hand corner has arms outstretched towards the picture plane (Fig. 90). Surviving *pentimenti* reveal that this particular Heliade's arms were earlier placed

[306] For a compelling account of Bartolomeo Scala's life as well as his association with Medici humanist circles and institutional importance in Florence, see A. Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala 1430-1497: The Humanist as Bureaucrat*, Princeton, 1979.

higher above her head. There is no indication of the Heliades' pending transformation into poplar trees as is stated in the Ovidian myth. Against a backdrop of sparse vegetation, the recumbent river god Eridanus, with unkempt white hair, a long beard and morose expression looks downward as if oblivious to the impending catastrophe (Fig. 91). Eridanus is propped against a large vessel which spills out its contents to form a stream which flows across the width of the foreground. Under Eridanus's left arm there is a much smaller and empty pitcher. A medium sized vessel also spills its contents from between the feet of the central Heliade. A much more diminutive male figure struggles to bear aloft a fourth receptacle with head bowed and flexed arms. Cygnus, as a swan with neck extended and closed beak, is positioned between the central Heliade and the one with outstretched arms (Fig. 92).

Pictorial Analysis

One clear indication that we are intended to envision *The Fall of Phaeton* as an unfolding chronicle of events is revealed in Michelangelo's compositional strategy. The pyramidal configuration is dominated by a central vertical axis which conveys the drama of the narrative on three registers united by a vertical downward movement. Unlike *Ganymede* and *Tityus* which both resist narrative closure, Michelangelo unites different successive episodes in the Ovidian myth with three balanced figural groups that together relate the complete Phaeton story. Each dramatic event in the Ovidian myth is represented in its inevitable succession with formal coherence and narrative clarity. In order to link the work's formal elements to the meaning of the whole drawing, these three cardinal scenes are organised in a dramatic meandering 'zigzag' fashion that calls to mind the structure of a lightning-bolt when read from top to bottom.

Michelangelo stations Zeus at the compositional apex with his arm raised having just hurled the fateful destructive bolt. This dramatization of the Zeus figure has congruence with the posture that Michelangelo created three years later for his equally judicial Christ in the *Last Judgement* fresco for the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican (Fig. 93).[307] It appears evident that the themes of fall and condemnation in both *Phaeton* and the *Last Judgement* share a distinct pictorial vocabulary in terms of expression and formal composition, and are related thematically through their mutual conceptions of sin, punishment and redemption. Moreover, the patriarchal punitive Zeus who executes divine retribution seemingly anticipates, in both form and iconography, ideas that reached monumental embodiment in the motif of the *terribilità* and authority of Christ in judgement in the Vatican scene. Additionally, judgement and punishment by paternal authority for prohibited behaviour resonates throughout both of these works in which Michelangelo depicts chaotic scenes of fatality and lamentation conjoined with mankind's salvation through divine intervention.

Of particular interest is how while maintaining the general tenor of the Ovidian myth, Michelangelo alters the note of what Panofsky terms as 'presumptuousness' pervading the text with the presence of subtle referents of a sexual nature.[308] Narrative fidelity is maintained when Zeus is presented as hurling his lightning-bolt from a position close to his right ear as the text testifies, but yet, Michelangelo includes his own adaptation when he positions Zeus astride his emblematic majestic eagle which has its beaked head in the proximity of the god's groin (Fig. 94). It could be tentatively

[307] It is of interest to note that the pose of Zeus in the British Museum version is almost identical to the figure of *Tityus*, but rotated in a vertical position.
[308] See Panofsky, 1939, pp. 210-20 who rather simplistically describes Phaeton as 'an expression of the feeling of utter inferiority manifested in Michelangelo's first letters to the young nobleman'.

suggested that this motif is a secondary allusion to the anticipation of both pleasure and pain through carnal behaviour.

Significantly, the cause of Phaeton's fate is his recklessness in driving too close to the sun, which finds poetic consonance in Michelangelo's proclamation of his burning desire for Tommaso, who in the artist's own words, 'sets aflame my heart' so that 'in the hot sun I should renew myself through fire… in which my whole body burns'. When the *Phaeton* drawing is understood in conjunction with the sense of turmoil Michelangelo expresses in various poems and letters, it is possible to associate the tumultuous effect of instability and upheaval precipitating Phaeton's demise with the artist's own state of emotional and psychological anguish about the perils of getting too close to the 'flame, too scorching'[309] beauty of Tommaso to whom he avowed 'may I like dry wood in a burning fire burn, if I do not love you heartily'.[310] This supposition seems to be confirmed by the fact that Michelangelo has selected the precise moment from the myth when the transgressing Phaeton is usurped from his place of safety. It is conceivable that Michelangelo assigned metaphoric potency to the now unleashed chariot itself in a self-reflective evocation of his own fears of being expelled from the secure vehicle of sacred celibate love that has safely transported him so far on his journey to a chaste life and the hope of divine redemption (Fig. 95). An endeavour to contain subversive desire arises with rhetorical vigour in *Sonnet 95* where Michelangelo seems to speak of his difficulty in overcoming the fire in his soul which 'lacks a rein and lacks a guide':

> Since I have straw for flesh and my heart's sulphur,
> since I have bones consisting of dry wood, since my
> soul lacks a rein and lacks a guide, since I jump at
> desire, at beauty further, since all my brains are

[309] Ryan, 'Madrigal 91',1998, p. 68
[310] Ryan, 'Stanza 94', 1998, p. 70.

> weak and blind and totter, and since quicklime and traps fill all the world, it will be no surprise when I am burned by a flash of the first fire I encounter. Since I've the beautiful art, that those who bear it From heaven used to conquer nature with, even if she can parry everywhere, if I, not blind or deaf for it, a true match for my heart's fire-setting thief, he is to blame who fated me to fire.[311]

This theme of chaos and cataclysmic upheaval in *Phaeton* invites interpretation in the context of Michelangelo's apparent turmoil over his attachment to Tommaso. At the very centre of this visionary narrative denoting the consequences of divine intervention and deliverance in action, Michelangelo renders his rebellious Phaeton as the antithesis between earthbound sexuality and the hope of heavenly bliss. It can be adduced that by encapsulating the tumultuous effect of instability and upheaval which follows divine punishment Michelangelo makes manifest visually his fear of terrible impending consequences for his consuming infatuation with Tommaso:

> Fire, in which all is harmed, Burns me, has not consumed, But not through my greater or its lesser power. I, like the salamander, Only where others die find my support, And do not know who, calm, prods my distress. By you yourself your face, By me myself my heart Was never made, by us My love will not be ever torn apart. That master who has placed My life within your eyes is higher still I love, you do not feel; Forgive me, as I do this misery That wills I die outside who murders me.[312]

By placing at the most cardinal point in the composition Phaeton's demise at the moment he is usurped from the chariot after being dealt divine punishment, Michelangelo codifies all that runs counter to the notion of Christianity's upwardly striving attempt to find salvation. *The Fall of Phaeton*, with its themes of epic

[311] Ryan, 'Sonnet 95', 1998, p. 71.
[312] Ryan, 'Madrigal 120', 1998, p. 84.

punishment and ensuing lamentation also has resonance with the biblical Fall of Adam. Accordingly, Michelangelo renders Phaeton the ignoble perpetrator in a manner devoid of all sense of heroism or triumphalism. Instead, Phaeton is audaciously depicted as if turning his back (or even backside) to God and plunging like Lucifer, the fallen angel, to a level beneath mankind's assigned position. Of particular importance is how Michelangelo's Phaeton who has been hurled from his chariot by the intervention of Zeus's shaft of lightning now becomes absorbed into a dynamic orgiastic mêlée where his human inverted form becomes almost indiscernible from that of the horses hurtling downwards with him. Phaeton is presented as the personification of both animality and mortality as he writhes amongst the beasts that will share his fate.

In addition to how Michelangelo visually aligns Phaeton's complicated posture with that of the horses, another particular iconographic detail which leaps to one's attention is how the position and approximate scale of the genitalia is duplicated in both man and beast (Fig. 96). Certainly, Phaeton's is not the exquisite, idealised and neat penis of antiquity that was favoured by Michelangelo in his usual execution of the nude male body. That Michelangelo should visually parallel Phaeton's genitals and that of the horses with unusual anatomical exaggeration of the penis and prominent testes becomes all the more remarkable when we reflect how large male organs were considered to be unsightly and crude in classical antiquity.[313] Moreover, as Patricia Simons informs us: 'horses were infamously lusty and the horse or *cavallo* was a metaphor for the male genitals' in the early modern period as well as classical antiquity.[314] Hence, this prodigious display of Phaeton's physical sexuality seems intended to visually accentuate

[313] In antiquity taste in male penises ran to small and taut. Aristotle offers a scientific explanation for this predilection when he argues that the small penis is more fertile than the large one because the seed has a shorter distance to travel and hence does not cool off, see D. Gracia, 'The structure of medical knowledge in Aristotle's philosophy', *Sudhoff Archiv* 62 (No.1), 1978, pp. 1-36.
[314] Simons, 2011, p. 111.

Phaeton's assimilation with those perceived to be of animalistic sexual character.[315] This visual interconnection between man and beast clarifies the full sense of the central episode of Michelangelo's composition, thereby offering a reading which provides a potent and didactic commentary on Phaeton's misconduct and its perceived consequential degradation of his soul to that of animals which live without laws or doctrines. It also permits us to interrogate how the metaphoric potency of the *Phaeton* drawing might be allied to Renaissance assumptions where acts of male erotic attachment for each other were perceived to be inextricably linked to bestiality under the rubric of sodomy.

It is my conviction that this convergence of man and beast is a pivotal key to the meaning of the entire theme of this central register. By conflating the disposition of Phaeton's freefalling body, both compositionally and iconographically, with that of the plummeting beasts in one entangled and unbridled group, Michelangelo accomplishes a direct allusion to a range of classical and scholastic paradigms which comment on the subject of bestial irrationality and man's rational intelligence. Through such means, Michelangelo establishes a direct correlation between irrational uncontrolled sexual behaviour and acting irresponsibly with animalistic propensity. For progress towards an effective civilised Renaissance society, it was perceived nascent that mankind avoided gaining the reputation of a beast. Therefore, moral and societal paradigms dictated that those males who act out base physical impulses, particularly those which involved a man mounting another from the rear, were considered debased because they were seen as a reminder of humanity's connection to the animal kingdom. As creatures of body *and* soul and therefore distinct from beasts, mankind should aspire to overcome the

[315] For an insightful cultural history of the sexual characterisation of male bodies from antiquity to the sixteenth century, also see G. L. Hersey, *The Evolution of Allure*, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1996.

earthbound mortality of God's other beings. The idea that man and beast are distinguished by their relative capacity for rational thought had been axiomatic from the time of Aristotle who declared: 'divine goodness is something more exalted than virtue, and bestial badness is different in kind from vice'.[316] Such ideas pronouncing that the defining quality of man was his soul and intellect, whereas animals were controlled by their natural appetite and unrestrained by reason, also draw upon the teachings of Thomas Aquinas who declared the cause of sexual perversity was when 'the correct relation in human desires can be so corrupted that it exceeds the limits of the human mode of living, like the inclinations of a dumb animal… it is just as if the temperament of a man's body had been changed into a lion or a pig'.[317] Perceptions that humans are expected to be 'ideally intellectual' not 'beastly appetitive'[318] gained currency in the fifteenth century with the philosophy of Cristoforo Landino who professed in his 1458 *Commento*: 'but sometimes it is as much the perversion of appetite and of reason, as that which not only agrees to sin, but almost forgetting what is man, passing all boundaries of the human species they take on the customs and the nature of the beast, and this disposition is called bestiality'.[319] Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-72) treatise *I Libri della famiglia* (1450) supplies additional evidence of how the relationship of humanity to animals was understood at this time. For Alberti, all sexual non-procreative and extra-marital love was bestial, unnatural and aberrant:

> By the force of reason, without which a man can hardly be called anything but stupid, he restrains himself from every sort of lust. Take from man the power and habit of reasoning, and nothing is left to distinguish him from the forest animals but a rather different thoroughly useless set of limbs. The beasts

[316] Aristotle, *Ethics*, VII, i.1., trans. James Urmson, Oxford, 1988.
[317] T. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, Notre Dame, 1993, paragraph 1296.
[318] For further reading on Renaissance philosophy and its stance on bestial behaviour see B. P. Copenhaver and C. B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford and New York, 1992, pp. 113-14.
[319] C. Landino, *Commento*, vol.2, p. 610.

> though without perfect speech, yet have this much at least of reason, that they obey their appetite only when nature demands it of them for procreation's sake. But man becomes entangled in his pleasures, not to satisfy nature but to satiate and finally disgust himself. He urges himself on in pursuit of an excessive and indeed bestial desire which, since it is subject to the will is not rational.[320]

In this regard, the moral force behind the conceptual framework for Michelangelo's *Fall of Phaeton* can be considered in relation to the ecclesiastical and classical sources which provided the ideals and expectancies of its original viewers concerning such notions of unnaturalness that surrounded sodomy.

At this juncture I would like to draw attention to possible pictorial citations for this drawing. While Michelangelo's *Fall of Phaeton* drawing is original in attitude and execution, one can also trace alternative pictorial stimuli which could have influenced the master's execution. As previously established, *Phaeton*'s direct source is almost certainly the aforementioned ancient sarcophagus which was rediscovered in Rome at the end of the fifteenth century (Fig. 97). Although Zeus is absent in this relief, Michelangelo has evidently appropriated formal and iconographic considerations from this rather static lateral composition for a more intensely dramatic vertiginous rendering of the narrative in his version of the same *Fall of Phaeton* theme. Despite his departure from the original compositional strategy, Michelangelo's *Phaeton* displays iconographic retention of the nude physically idealised youth and the formal depiction of its horses, thereby preserving a conscious formal classical citation perhaps intended to be recognised by Tommaso.[321]

[320] L. B. Alberti, *I Libri Della Famiglia*, Vol.1, trans. R. Watkins, Long Grove, 1988, pp. 94-5, 101-2.
[321] The church where the sarcophagus was found was in close proximity to Tommaso's home in Rome, therefore we can safely assume that the relief was probably seen by both Michelangelo and Tommaso and discussed together.

Scholarly opinion that Michelangelo's studies of the *Fall of Phaeton* should be conclusively identified with this classical relief is unanimous but there has been no published acknowledgement that the drawings might indeed also cite any other work. To my mind, the likelihood that the central register of Michelangelo's *Phaeton* may have some indebtedness to the stucco panels at the Palazzo Scala della Gherardesca has been erroneously overlooked to date (Figs. 98-100).[322] It is useful to note, however, that the same didactic philosophy which dominates the aforementioned classical and scholastic invectives on mankind's need to elevate his behaviour beyond the station of beasts also provides the overarching theme of these Scala reliefs. As I have proposed, the informing motif for the central register of *Phaeton* can be interpreted as a portent on the consequences that can follow the transgressing activities of mankind when reduced to a bestial state. This same premise concerning the need for behavioural differentiation between animality and humanity is also established visually in the Palazzo Scala reliefs where all three panels offer clear demonstrations of man's conduct with animals in action.

A closer view of the equestrian figures in the stucco panels of the Palazzo Scala reveals that they bear a conspicuous similarity to those which plummet to earth in an inverted fashion alongside the hapless Phaeton**.** I contend that Michelangelo could have reworked the densely populated composition of the *War* scene in particular (Fig. 101). Here, as in the Phaeton, chaos also pervades as male nude figures and horses become entangled into one force which cannot easily be told apart. To establish the nature of the manner in which this *War* panel can be comprehended as corresponding with the moral potency of *Phaeton*, it is necessary to be guided by how there is no obvious outcome or

[322] For a general discussion of the history of these panels and their depiction of mankind reduced to a bestial state, see S. Nethersole, *Drunkenness, War* and *Sovereignty*: Three Stucco Panels from the Palazzo Scala in Florence in *Art History*, 34/3, June 2011, pp. 467-85.

reason for the conflict in *War* but casualties on both opposing forces are rendered as dead and severely wounded. The very nature of this panel's imagery makes possible a reading of *War* as another precursor for Michelangelo's *Phaeton* since both creations appear to share a wellspring of meaning anchored in the same contemporary societal concerns that provided their moral force. That is, the importance of preserving the dignity of man by following a rational human, not irrational bestial, life. In the light of the fact that both Michelangelo and Bartolomeo Scala were associated with Medicean humanist circles and benefactors of Laurentian patronage, it seems likely that the artist would have been conversant with the stucco panels at Palazzo Scala since he was in residence in Florence for a twenty-year period throughout the time of their execution.

The chaotic scene of fatality and punishment in the central register now evolves vertically into a more structured depiction of the aftermath of Phaeton's demise with all its resulting collateral damage in the lower register below. In this section of the composition Michelangelo fully elaborates on the consequential collateral damage resulting from Phaeton's reckless behaviour with a scene that foregrounds the lamenting Heliades and his only friend Cygnus who has already been transformed into a swan (Fig. 102). Through their expressions and gestures of alarm these three sisters exude desperation and terror at the idea of the world's inexorable annihilation. Michelangelo further reinforces visually this fatal sense of the earth's impending doom with his rendering of an extremely morose figure of the river god Eridanos who bears a very sombre expression of resignation and sadness. As a result of Phaeton's reckless self-serving action the waters necessary to fertilise nature and sustain humankind are about to desiccate.

I propose that Tommaso would have been confronting a philosophical work with a moral entreaty in each of these drawings. By carrying out a close visual analysis of this

section of *Phaeton* and by demonstrating how it both engages with and diverges from its sources it is possible to offer an interpretive framework where Michelangelo could have encapsulated his fears for the prospect of natural procreation and mankind's generative potential. It is noteworthy that Michelangelo's subject choice is Phaeton who had the temerity to disobey his prescribed path in life and serve his own desires by irresponsibly losing his self-control and straying too close to the sun. His pleasure-seeking irrational behaviour which has wrought potential annihilation on the earth and almost destroyed mankind's existence could be metaphorically aligned with the potential consequences that would face humanity if males neglected their generative duties in order to pursue sexual pleasure with other males. In order to expound upon how Michelangelo could have been intentionally connecting these female figures of the Heliade's with notions of fertility and parturition, there are several points worth drawing out here.

In Ovid's narrative, Phaeton's sisters the Heliades transform into poplars but in Michelangelo's study their metamorphosis has yet to begin. Instead, Michelangelo represents them as young fertile women rather than in their post-metamorphosed state, as if to perhaps intentionally preserve their symbolic association with nature, fertility and conception. In *Phaeton*, all fecundate potential is thrown into immediate desperate peril because Michelangelo situates these women in harm's way immediately in the path of the falling stricken Phaeton and his horses rapidly descending to their doom (Fig. 103). To conceivably reiterate the loss of the Heliades' fertile capacity Michelangelo includes a labouring smaller figure amongst the group who carries a hollow water pitcher and he also situates a similar empty vessel under Eridanus's left arm (Fig. 104-105). More significantly, as if alluding to the importance of menstruation for fertile conception and to emphasise their barren wombs, Michelangelo strategically locates between the legs of the central female figure an overturned vessel which discharges its

precious fluid onto the soon to be parched and infertile earth. In a correspondingly didactic indication of the consequences of wasting the seminal fluid essential to mankind's generative potential, the content of Eridanus's larger vessel is also squandered as the liquid for sustaining humankind's life force is spilled out onto fallow ground. In so doing, Michelangelo could ostensibly intend to evince the disastrous fate that would inevitably befall mankind if natural procreation were to be affected by men pursuing their erotic desires with other males. It is my contention that it is with decidedly metaphorical intent that Michelangelo's *The Fall of Phaeton* is rendered as a potent mythological narrative which edifies his fears concerning the connection between male erotic conduct, barrenness and death. Further personal resonance for Michelangelo is perhaps to be found in Cygnus who is transformed into a swan after being killed by his one and only friend who turned against him.[323] The prominence Michelangelo gives to this mythic Cygnus is conceivably another allusion to overbearing love and its potential punishment which finds correlation in his poetic lamentations:

> I weep, I burn, I waste away, and my heart is fed by all this. O sweet destiny! Who else is there who lives only on his death, as I do, on suffering and pain? Oh cruel archer, you know just the moment in which to put to rest, with your powerful hand, our brief and anguished misery; for one who lives in death never dies.[324]

But in all this powerful dramatic narrative of catastrophic retribution there is one aspect which, in my opinion, captures most cogently the didactic function of the *Fall of Phaeton*. The most revealing indicator of Michelangelo's moralistic thought can surely be found in the Heliade who has her arms outstretched as she looks heavenward. The disastrous sequence of events which began with divine intervention at the apex of the

323 Ovid, *Metamorphosis* Book 2, 367; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 10, 189 ff.
324 Saslow, 'Sonnet 74' 1991, p. 183.

composition continues vertically through descending episodes of dramatic action which track the very path of Zeus's bolt of lightning downward, until our eye comes to rest upon the last figure of the Heliade in the lower corner (Fig. 106). It is my line of reasoning that at this point Michelangelo incorporates a potent crucifixion subtext which relates her closely to Christ on the Cross.[325] The stance and gesture of this Heliade could be a pious allusion to divine deliverance in the way she adopts the pose of an 'orant' who according to Jensen is 'a universal and popular figure of late antique art, almost always shown as a woman, standing, facing front, gazing heavenward, with her hands outstretched and lifted'.[326] Indeed, there were several wall paintings dating to the 2nd and 3rd centuries depicting this praying pose in Rome's catacombs (Figs. 107-109).[327] As Jensen proclaims: 'this nearly universal praying position of late antiquity (today ordinarily reserved for clergy celebrating the Eucharist or proclaiming a benediction), was described by Tertullian as having the appearance of Christ on the cross: ''We, however, not only raise our hands, but even expand them; and taking our model from the Lord's passion, even in prayer we confess to Christ'''.[328] I contend, therefore, that by his positioning of this Heliade closest to the picture plane as if reaching out to make a connection with the beholder, Michelangelo invokes a poignant reminder of Christ's sacrifice in order to obtain mankind's salvation from sin. In one final unequivocal gesture that could be interpreted as propounding the moral dictates of his own pious disposition and that of his society, Michelangelo conceivably evinces with impassioned gravity a pointed allusion to the perquisite of humanity's redemption. Tangentially, Michelangelo also instils within this scene of death, judgement,

[325] The existence of several *pentimenti* suggests that particular attention and deliberation was paid to the position of this Heliade's arms.
[326] R. M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, London and New York, 2009, p. 35.
[327] See S. James, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered monuments of Early Christianity*, London, 1978, p. 50 for an account of the excavation of Rome's catacombs during the period 1501-1601.
[328] Jensen, 2009, p. 36.

lamentation and consequential extermination a persuasive and effective signification of the central importance he ascribed to virtue and godliness in his art.

Conclusion

The premise of this chapter has been focused on the manner in which these works can lead us to the questions that stand at the centre of Michelangelo's attempts to visually communicate to Tommaso de' Cavalieri his enchantment, his anguish and his deepest fears. Exploration of Michelangelo's poetic commentary has allowed us to interrogate his thinking further, but every effort has been made to ensure that conjecture on the matter of whether those feelings ever became consummated has been deliberately precluded. The analyses that have been undertaken above have reflected upon the manner in which Michelangelo was working within the established parameters of his time, despite the fact that he was addressing both pictorially and textually in a specific voice to a particular and very intimate audience. By situating these very personal works in relationship to the sexual, social and cultural values of the period itself, I have attempted to offer new perspectives on the intellectual, ethical or spiritual inferences and meanings that the works could have held for an infatuated yet pious man of Michelangelo's artistic stature operating within the moral and religious tenor of Renaissance Italy.

The pictorial evaluations of all three presentation drawings of *The Rape of Ganymede, The Punishment of Tityus* and *The Fall of Phaeton* have offered interpretive frameworks to suggest that this trope of presentation drawings provides a privileged medium for the evaluation of Michelangelo's amatory, moral and religious disposition. By drawing on certain interrelated biographical circumstances which find correlation in the sonnets and letters Michelangelo wrote to Tommaso, an alternative reading of these

drawings as edifying allegories of the cause, effect and consequence of fulfilled physical desire is offered. There has been close consideration how of the period's legacy of ecclesiastical and theological proscriptions against male erotic interactions may well have demanded that the artist confront in close succession issues surrounding his innermost feelings and desires concerning his relationship with Tommaso. If viewed as independent images, each assumes a personal meaning and significance which reveals itself in the narratives Michelangelo employs. Read individually, all three have provided distinct points of reference for teasing out and discussing some interesting wider moralistic and societal implications. However, the larger significance of my inquiry lies in the hypothesis that a link exists between all three drawings. From this perspective these presentation drawings could be seen as the visual embodiment of Michelangelo's unfolding passions and fears as they developed in an organic fashion from the causal ecstasy of *The Rape of Ganymede*, through the effect of pain and suffering in *The Punishment of Tityus* and conclude with his realisation that sinful misconduct is punished with terrible consequence in *The Fall of Phaeton*.

CHAPTER THREE

Apollo and Marsyas: The Masculine Body Flayed Bare

Introduction

So far, this thesis has focused upon the relationship between mythology and the performance of gender with particular attention paid to the visual representation of male same-sex erotic desire. This final chapter studies the myth of Apollo and Marsyas from the point of view of identity with emphasis on the subject of the flayed male body and its possible meanings for Renaissance society. Of prime importance to its argument is how such pictorial representations of the flayed body can be read as the nexus where myth, identity, power, self-knowledge and imagination coalesce with Renaissance societal, cultural and political concerns.[329]

Where my methodology differs from previous studies of the subject, is in its aim for a more analytical approach to the imaginary and symbolic resonances associated with the theme of the flayed male body. In the critical arguments to follow, I explore the prominence of the flayed body in visual imagery through examination of selected case studies of the flaying of Marsyas together with the depiction of the flayed body in various juridical and medical contexts. In order to investigate the boundaries between Renaissance culture, masculinity and the draw of this theme of the flayed body as a site of agency and fascination, the principal questions that will be addressed are as follows.

[329] For a partial census of antique works depicting this myth of Apollo and Marsyas available in the Renaissance see P. Bober and R. Rubenstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, London, 1986, pp. 72-6.

First, I consider the extent to which parallels can be drawn between the flaying *topos* and the period's search for the hidden interior and concepts of masculine identity. Second, I explore how the representational potency of the flayed male body could have been intended to engender and express a punitive discourse that functioned variously in disciplinary, exemplary, pedagogic and judicial ways. Third, I examine the manner in which the flayed body became the main locus of knowledge, edification and understanding in a series of human anatomical studies. Finally, I assess the significance of the flayed body in the symbolic and interpretive modes implemented by Michelangelo for his redemptive programme of the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

Mythography of Marsyas

The account of the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas and its grisly outcome was certainly well known in the Renaissance from rediscovered classical literature, but the most widely read version was Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*[330]

> So he related how the clowns were changed to leaping frogs; and after he was through, another told the tale of Marsyas, in these words: The Satyr Marsyas, when he played the flute in rivalry against Apollo's lyre, lost that audacious contest and, alas! His life was forfeit; for, they had agreed the one who lost should be the victor's prey. And, as Apollo punished him, he cried, "Ah-h-h! Why are you now tearing me apart? A flute has not the value of my

[330] Physical evidence of Renaissance access to the myth is found in an incunabulum of the *Metamorphoses* in the Bodleian library which has marginal notes in the hand of Poliziano dated 1477 next to the passages on Marsyas in book VI. See A.C. de la Mare, 'Autographs of Italian Humanists', *The Library*, vol. 20, Oxford, 1975 - an exhibition catalogue to mark the visit of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, 10 December 1974. Boccaccio's allegorical anthology of classical myths *de genealogia deorum gentilium*, composed in 1350 and first published in Venice in 1472, which was much consulted as a reference book in the Renaissance, also refers to the myth of Apollo and Marsyas. See J. R. Davidson, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts*, 1330-1990, Vol. 2, New York and Oxford, 1993, pp. 638-43.

> life!" Even as he shrieked out in his agony, his living skin was ripped off from his limbs, till his whole body was a flaming wound, with nerves and veins and viscera exposed. But all the weeping people of that land, and all the Fauns and Sylvan Deities, and all the Satyrs, and Olympus, his loved pupil—even then renowned in song, and all the Nymphs, lamented his sad fate; and all the shepherds, roaming on the hills, lamented as they tended fleecy flocks. And all those falling tears, on fruitful Earth, descended to her deepest veins, as drip the moistening dews,—and, gathering as a fount, turned upward from her secret-winding caves, to issue, sparkling, in the sun-kissed air, the clearest river in the land of Phrygia,—through which it swiftly flows between steep banks down to the sea: and, therefore, from his name, 'tis called "The Marsyas" to this very day.[331]

Ovid's adaption of the myth is pre-dated by the Greek scholar Apollodorus (or pseudo-Apollodorus) whose work flourished in the 2nd century B.C.E.[332] According to this more extended version, which was also known during the Renaissance, the satyr Marsyas was a flute player who challenged Apollo to a music contest after picking up a flute which had been discarded by Athena who was disgusted with the way her features were distorted when she played.

> Apollo also slew Marsyas, the son of Olympus. This fellow had come upon the flute which Athena had thrown away because it made her face misshapen, and he proceeded to face Apollo in a musical contest. It was decided that the winner could do whatever he wanted with the loser. During the contest Apollo played lyre in a reverse position, and invited Marsyas to do the same. But Marsyas was incapable of this feat, and so Apollo won. He finished off Marsyas by hanging him from a lofty pine and flaying him.[333]

[331] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, 382, 400.
[332] In this earlier version Marsyas is suspended from a tree. The fact that this iconographic detail is favoured in several representations suggests that this version was also popular in the Renaissance.
[333] *Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca* 1. 24., trans. J. G. Frazer, Vols. 121-2, Harvard, 1921, p. 233.

As related by Ovid, when played by Marsyas, the flute, having once been inspired by the breath of a goddess, emitted of its own accord the most beautiful strains. Elated by his success, Marsyas was rash enough to challenge Apollo to a musical contest but the conditions of which were that the victor should do what he pleased with the vanquished. Apollo played upon his lyre and Marsyas upon the flute but it was not until the former added his voice to the music that the contest was decided in his favour. As a just punishment for the presumption of Marsyas, Apollo bound him to a tree, and flayed him alive. His blood was the source of the river Marsyas, and Apollo hung up his skin in the cave out of which that river flows.

Historiography on the 'Flaying of Marsyas' theme

The most comprehensive research published to date on the popularity of the theme of Apollo and Marsyas can be found in Edith Wyss' *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images* (1996), which catalogues over one hundred works of art from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[334] Although the book sheds 'new light on the perception of this theme in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries',[335] Wyss almost exclusively sees the contest between Apollo and Marsyas within a cultural dialect of Neoplatonic philosophy. Wyss draws heavily on Plato's application of Pythagorean principles in his dialogues and the manner in which he related these to the harmony of the soul, declaring music to have the power to attune the soul to heavenly harmony, foster virtue, and purify. According to Wyss, the myth reflects Apollo's preservation of the divine control of harmony with his lyre, which Marsyas threatened with his impure and discordant pipe. She understands this musical

[334] E. Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images*, Delaware, 1996.
[335] Wyss, 1996, p. 6.

contest in terms of the ideas of these reflections on musical harmony in Plato, where in cosmology, numerical proportions governed the universe. Seeing the symbol of universal harmony as Apollo's lyre, Wyss claims that 'the seven stringed, tuned lyre assumed a central metaphorical role in this comprehensive philosophical system that revolved around harmony as the structuring and maintaining force in the cosmos as well as the sub-lunar realm'.[336] In this way, the flaying of Marsyas is thus interpreted by Wyss as a purification that revealed the universal harmony to the satyr.[337] Wyss follows the critical vocabulary of Panofsky who also saw the pan-pipe as 'a symbol of low-class and uncouth as opposed to refined and intellectual music'.[338] According to Panofsky the 'age-old theme of that contrast between two kinds of music – the cultured *vs*. the rustic in classical antiquity, the sacred *vs*. the sinful in the Middle Ages – which had found its paradigmatic expression in the contest of Apollo and Marsyas', was transformed in the Middle Ages into a contrast between sacred harmonious music and sinful discordant secular music.[339]Again referring to the Pythagorean concept of harmony, Wyss arrives at formulations such as 'the holy consonances will envelope Marsyas's soul and raise it to the celestial realm. Apollo's cruel sacrifice of Marsyas is reaffirmed as an ordeal of cleansing that will liberate his soul from the '*cancere corporeo*' and release it into the dominion of celestial harmony'.[340] There are several literary parallels for Wyss's thinking on the manner in which the struggling satyr may have served as an allegory for hubris punished and as a Platonic symbol of spiritual liberation.

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[336] Wyss, 1996, p. 29.
[337] Wyss, 1996, p. 33.
[338] Panofsky, 1970, p. 204. This contrast between the lyre and the *aulos* or flute is treated in an ethical and civic context in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. The same point is made in the myth of Apollo and Pan, where according to Plato and Aristotle, the lyre represents moderation and rationality, while the *aulos* symbolises the rustic life and primitive, uncontrolled emotions. In both myths, Apollo is represented as the god of the art of music, and at the same time symbolises the triumph of a culture that can dominate base and barbaric emotion.
[339] Panofsky, 1970, p. 204.
[340] Wyss, 1996, p. 139.

A theory that has received much more extensive commentary in relation to the Marsyas myth is its relation to Neo-platonic philosophy on liberation of the soul from the restraints of earthly existence which has been explored by Jaromir Neumann in his book *Titian, the flaying of Marsyas* where the author presents a Neoplatonic interpretation of Titian's eponymous painting (1570-76) (Fig.110). Seeing the painting as a redemptive allegory based on Florentine Neo-platonic philosophy, Neumann perceives the contest between Apollo and Marsyas as primarily the idea of the victory of the higher arts over the lower ones and as the 'discovery of higher values hidden within, as a process of purification and promotion'.[341] In his *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance,* Edgar Wind also attributes an exclusively Neo-platonic interpretation to Raphael's *Apollo and Marsyas* (1509-11*)* (Fig.111). Wind adds to the weight of Neo-platonic scholarship on the Marsyas myth when he regards the flute 'as the Bacchic instrument for arousing the dark and uncontrollable passions that conflict with the purity of Apollo's lyre'.[342] Wind also propounds that Apollo no longer tortures Marsyas to death but instead is seen in the act of freeing his soul from its fleshly gaol by attempting to unveil the sheathed truth according to the Platonic paradigm: 'The musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas was therefore concerned with the relative powers of Dionysian darkness and Apollonian clarity; and if the contest ended with the flaying of Marsyas, it was because flaying itself was a Dionysian rite, a tragic ordeal by purification by which the ugliness of the outward man was thrown off and the beauty of his inward self revealed'.[343] Certainly, one cannot deny that philosophical thought was far from a marginal issue in Renaissance humanist circles. Neoplatonic interpretations of the myth of Marsyas in Lorenzo de Medici's circle have been noted by André

[341] J. Neumann, *Titian: The Flaying of Marsyas*, London, 1962, p. 26.
[342] E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London, 1967, p. 172.
[343] Wind, 1967, p. 173.

Chastel, who cites the letter of 1484 by Pico della Mirandola to the Venetian humanist, Ermolao Barbaro where, in the voice of a satirised scholastic full of hyperbole, Pico mentions the words of Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*:

> But would you like me to give you an image of our discourse? It is exactly like the Silenii of our Alcibiades… thus if you look at the outside, you see a monster, and if you look inside you recognise a god… o man of delicate tastes, when you go to the flautists or with those who play the cithara, be all ears; but when you go to the philosophers, turn into yourself, in the depths of your soul, in the recesses of your mind. Have the years of the man from Tyana, with which, liberated from your body, you hear not the earthly Marsyas, but the heavenly Apollo who on his divine *cetra* modulates with ineffable harmonies the hymns of the universe. [344]

Dante also touched upon Platonic sources and the myth when he invoked Apollo, god of poetry, begging him to inspire him in the completion of the *Paradiso*:

> O good Apollo, for this last labour make me such a vessel of your worth as you require for granting your beloved Laurel. Thus far the one peak of Parnassus has sufficed me, but now I have need of both, as I enter the arena that remains. Enter into my breast and breathe there as when you drew Marsyas from the sheath of his limbs.[345]

In the eighteenth century, similar philosophical concepts were expressed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), who proclaimed that flaying is a process of morphology where humankind's development demands the shedding of surface layers:

> life is unable to work at the surface or express its generative powers there. The whole activity of life requires a covering which protects it against the raw elements of its environment, be they water or air or light, a covering which preserves its delicate nature so that is may fulfil the specific purpose for which it

[344] A. Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, 3rd edition, Paris, 1982, p. 51.
[345] Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto 1, 13-15, 19-21, trans. Charles Singleton, reprinted in J. Pope-Hennessey, *Paradiso: The Illuminations to Dante's Divine Comedy by Giovanny di Paolo*, London, 1993, p. 194. Wyss also sees Dante's invocation to Apollo as the revival of Pythagorean ideology, 1996, pp. 34-5.

> is inwardly destined… the bark of trees, the skin of insects, the hair and feathers of animals, even the epidermis of man, are coverings forever being shed, cast off, given over to non-life. New coverings are constantly forming beneath the old, while still further down, close to this surface or more deeply hidden, life brings forth its web of creation.[346]

The German philologist Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) also saw humankind's continuous transformation and liberation as the shedding of the skin:

> we are misidentified – because we ourselves keep growing, keep changing, we shed our old bark, we shed our skins every spring, we keep becoming younger, fuller of future, taller, stronger, we push our roots ever more powerfully into the depths-into-evil-while at the same time we embrace the heavens ever more lovingly, more broadly, imbibing their light ever more thirstily with all our twigs and leaves.[347]

However, it is my contention that none of these scholars' theories proves wholly satisfactory because they proceed from this tactic assumption of a shared but rather narrow Neoplatonic purview. Whilst the Platonic epistemological mode has a place in the iconography of flaying, we should be wary of pinning too much interpretive weight on this philosophical framework without inviting consideration of the possible coexistence of a series of further multivalent symbolic and allegorical modes of signification. The arguments to follow aim to throw into question these suppositions that the myth of Apollo and Marsyas is entirely imbricated in Neoplatonic philosophy by affecting a link between the social psyche of this particular period and its cultural expression in a selection of Renaissance artworks depicting the flayed male body. This chapter proceeds from the proposition that the distressing nature of such images may

[346] Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, (1792), trans. D. Miller, New York, 1988, p. 66.
[347] F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1974, pp. 331-2.

have generated a powerful response through a range of other under-theorised literal and metaphoric associations and allegorical or exemplary functions.

The Cultural History of Flaying

Renaissance fascination with the depiction of flaying as a site of violence and suffering was disproportionate to the sentient reality of its actual occurrence since the subject had virtually no historical basis in fact. [348] The cultural history of the act of flaying in the early modern period is limited to the one isolated case of the Venetian commander Marcantonio Bragadin being flayed by Turkish troops in 1571 after the siege of Famagusta in Cyprus. [349] After his death, Bragadin's skin was stuffed with straw and sewn, reinvested with his military insignia, and exhibited riding an ox in a mocking procession along the streets of Famagusta before the quartered body was distributed as a war trophy among the Ottoman army.[350] Bragadin's head was brought to Constantinople as a gift for Sultan Selim II, but his skin was later recovered in 1580 and brought back to Venice to be interred in the Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo where it remains today. Visual representation of Bragadin's flaying is to be found in Pietro Longo's monochrome fresco (1579) on the ceiling of the Chamber of the Great Council in the Doges Palace, Venice (Fig.112). A mausoleum was erected in honour of Bragadin in 1590 which also includes a scene depicting *The Flaying of Marcantonio Bragadin* by Giuseppe Alabardi in Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice (Fig.113).

[348] W.R.L. Barron, 'The Penalties for Treason In Medieval Life And Literature', *Journal Of Medieval History*, vii, 1981, pp. 187-202.
[349] Bragadin was flayed in September 1571 at the taking of Famagosta. See the contemporary account by A. Gatto, 'Morte di M.Antonio Bragadin ed altri', *Biblioteca del Museo Correr Venezia*, Cod. Cicogna 2993/iv; cited in F. Egmond and R. Zwijnenberg, *Bodily Extremities*, Farnham, 2003, pp. 10-11.
[350] J.J.Norwich, *A History of Venice*. New York, 1982, p. 479.

It must be stressed, however, that by the time this incidence of an actual flaying occurred in 1571 Cyprus, a range of images of bodies flayed of their skin was already widely disseminated throughout Italy, as well as Northern Europe. It seems that the fascination with depicting the act of flaying in art was well established prior to the Bragadin occurrence. These were usually of the satyr Marsyas flayed by Apollo or religious imagery such as Agnolo Bronzino's *Saint Bartholomew* (1554-6) (Fig.114). According to Jacobus de Voragine's 13th century compilation of saints' lives *The Golden Legend*, the apostle Bartholomew was tortured and flayed for converting Polimius, the brother of the Armenian King, to the Christian faith and at the Last Judgement, he presented his old skin to God as proof of his martyrdom.[351] The two most relevant exceptions which post-date Bragadin's demise are Titian's painting of *The Flaying of Marsyas* which was executed in the five years following this event and Meier's *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* which was executed around 1581(Fig.115). There is no extant evidence to help us assess the impact of how Bragadin's flaying might have influenced these works but of particular note, however, is *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (1600) in Rome's Santi Nereo e Achilleo by Nicolò Circignani (Fig. 116).[352] This work, depicting a particularly gruesome flaying of Bartholomew, could have perhaps been a reference the fate of Bragadin with its inclusion of an onlooker on the left who is dressed Ottoman attire complete with turban (Fig. 117).

[351] See J. de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, translated from the Latin by G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, New York, 1969. For discussion of martyrological texts, see J. T. Rhodes, "English Books of Martyrs and Saints of the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Recusant History* 22, 1994, pp. 10-13. Also P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity.* Chicago, 1981, pp. 50-68.

[352] On Circigani see, S.J. Freedberg, (ed.), *Painting in Italy, 1500-1600*, London, 1993, pp. 649-50. For Circigani's style and other commisions see, L. Korrick, 'On the meaning of style: Nicolò Circignani in Counter-Reformation Rome', *Word and Image*, 15, 1999, pp. 170-89.

The period also witnessed the emergence of many anatomical illustrations showing dissected, skinless *écorchés* whose bodies give the impression of still being alive (Figs. 118-20). Therefore, in order to gain closer engagement of the artistic prominence of the flaying theme during the Renaissance, the larger significance of my inquiry lies in a number of hitherto hardly acknowledged links between the representation of the flayed body and broader cultural appropriations and associations. In the next section, I challenge the presumptions found in traditional scholarship that visual depiction of the fate of Marsyas, or his other flayed counterparts, served merely as an allegory for hubris punished or as a Platonic symbol of spiritual liberation.

Drawing back the Veil of Masculine Identity and the Discovery of Selfhood

My first argument centres upon the perception of masculine identity as a vital and dynamic facet in the understanding of the human self at this time. This new emphasis on the self as an individual subject with its own identity emerged in the fifteenth century as exposure to education and a complex network of interconnections and discoveries about humankind and its place in the universe began to invest one's self with a heightened sense of individualism.[353] This shaped a new awareness of one's personhood where people viewed the self and one's actions or thoughts as the foundation stone of human society. As Stephen Greenblatt states in his seminal book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 'the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a

[353] S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Chicago, 1980, pp. 136-56. Also, W. Kerrigan and G. Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance*, Baltimore, 1989 and R.F.E. Weismann, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism and Identity in Renaissance Florence', in S. Zimmerman and R. Weismann, (eds.), *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, Newark, 1989, pp. 269-80.

malleable, artful process'.[354] This emerging ethic of individualism fostered the perception of oneself as a unique entity, largely responsible for their own actions and words and capable of concealing or revealing their feelings and beliefs according to the dictation of circumstances. One primary cultural factor in the formation of Renaissance individualism was the emergence of humanism with its development of, and emphasis on, the virtues of intellectual freedom and individual expression. Instead of expressing the common Christian ideal of the Middle Ages, humanists extracted from their studies of classical literature, history, and moral philosophy an understanding of the social nature of humanity. This renewed importance on the expanded possibilities of life in this world addressed the relationship of one's words and actions to the internal self and allowed individuals to fashion their own cultural, religious, social and personal identities. The classical scholar and poet Poliziano exemplifies this awareness in his letter to Paolo Cortese (1554-1595): 'If someone says to me, ''you do not express yourself as if you were Cicero'', I shall reply, ''what of it? I am not Cicero, I express myself '' '.[355]

It is conceivable that the fascination with depicting the removal or flaying of skin had cultural associations with these new notions of individualism because one's skin is the part of the body where identity is formed and assigned. Flaying is an act denoting the most extreme inscription of power in the form of heinous torture and killing. However, the most potent issue in the majority of Renaissance depictions of Apollo flaying Marsyas is not the satyr's death but that the nature of the punishment is the removal of his skin.[356] Images such as Giovanni Stradano's engraving of *The Flaying of*

[354] Greenblatt, 1980, p. 2.
[355] Poliziano to Paolo Cortese, in E. Garin, (ed.), *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, Milan, 1952, p. 902.
[356] For an account of skin and its psychological importance, see C. Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*, New York, 2002. Also S. Connor, *The Book of the Skin*, London, 2004 and N.G. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History*, Berkeley, 2006.

Marsyas (c.1550) and Melchior Meier's engraving of *Apollo, Marsyas, and the Judgement of Midas* (1581) would have been narratively central and symbolically resonant to Renaissance audiences and patrons who advocated the general emancipation of the individual (Figs.121-22).[357] By symbolically addressing the subject of violence and the transcendence of the body boundary, images such as these allegorised how essential it was to be in possession of one's own skin and identity. The body flayed and degraded is devoid of both status and identity because it is the skin that imbues one with humanity and individuality and forms the centrepiece of the vocabulary of personhood. As a protective and identity forming outer layer which bears one's individualising characteristics, skin stands metonymically for the human being. It is the boundary between inner and outer and the symbolic interface between the body's hidden interiority and its surface.

As stated earlier, Meier's activity in Italy during the period 1572-82 in fact post-dates the one recorded historical flaying of the Venetian Marcantonio Bragadin of 1571 in Cypress. The extent to which this artist's approach to the theme was shaped, in part, by this gruesome event is difficult to determine but Meier does appear to be evoking certain contemporaneous cultural and ideological notions of the expressive subjectivity of the individual in his drawing. It can be suggested that Meier's engraving confronts the issue of the formation and inward reflection on this new notion of the human person

[357] Giovanni Stradano or Jan Van der Straet was a Flemish artist who worked at the Medici court from 1550 until his death in 1605. His work can be found in the Palazzo Vecchio's Studiolo of Francesco I and also in the Poggio a Caiano. For more on Stradano, see M. Sellink, *Stradanus (1532-1605), Court Artist of the Medici*, London, 2012. Much less is known about Melchior Meier and only a few of his prints remain extant. He is thought to have been either Swiss or German in origin but worked in Italy from 1572-83 as an engraver and draughtsman within the circle of Martino Rota where he was influenced by the techniques of Cornelis Cort, and Giorgio Ghisi. During his time in Florence, Meier was attached to the Medici court where he engraved a portrait of *Cosimo I de' Medici* (c.1573, Vienna, Albertina) and one of *Francesco I de' Medici* (c.1574-5, Vienna, Albertina). For further information on Meier and his work, see J. Rapp, 'Ein Meisterstich der Florentiner Spatrenaissancee ntsteht', *Pantheon* 43, 1985, pp. 61-70.

as a subjective individual when he depicts Marsyas' tormented body suffering removal of the surface onto which his identity was inscribed. The extreme and transgressive exposure of the satyr's bared flesh is presented as punishment and dishonour in a manner that extends the process of Apollo's retribution. Moreover, the fact that no figure looks at the skinless carcass and the manner in which Apollo stands physically between Marsyas and his skin, which he holds as a trophy, suggests that Marsyas' identity has already been eradicated. This abstraction of Marsyas' individuality and social identity could be seen as significant expressions of Renaissance notions that to have one's identity removed violated your essence and individuality, thus reducing one to a meaningless and anonymous carcass. In Meier's engraving, the satyr's features are assigned to the empty skin emphasising that without our skins we are merely an anonymous body of muscles and tissues. When Apollo dehumanises Marsyas by removing his skin he effaces the body's signifier of specificity and difference. He thereby not only destroys the most vital component of the satyr's individuality but also heightens his own power as victor in the way he holds aloft the skin and drapes it around himself. Whilst Marsyas is no longer recognised as an established form of a mythical being, Apollo is presented as the classic male nude, against which Meier juxtaposes Marsyas' violated carcass. Domination and submission are pitted against each other in the way Meier contrasts the satyr's vulnerable nakedness against the power of his opponent Apollo, who is protectively draped in Marsyas' eviscerated skin. By demanding that the viewer actively imagines their own bodily sensations, Meier appeals to one's own skin experience where sensory perception alerts one to the corporality of the torture in a way that heightens the cruelty of the depiction.

Similarly, Stradano's gruesome *Flaying of Marsyas* unites the theme of dishonour with violation of physical integrity in the way Apollo is shown peeling off the satyr's

skin and destroying the body's inner cohesion by crossing the margins of the body. This barbarity makes the aforementioned interpretive theories based on the paradigmatic philosophical concept that the image depicts purification and liberation of Marsyas' soul all the less convincing when we consider that what one sees is not the immaterial soul radiating from the opened body but a scene that is malevolent, pitiful, inhuman and abhorrent. By incorporating the myth of Apollo and Marsyas from pagan antiquity into the period's epistemological understanding of the importance of identity, both Meier and Stradano appear to place emphasis on the value assigned to the viewing of the Renaissance self as an agent or subject in increasingly individualised terms. Moreover, they suggest that the desecration of one's identity and honour may have held a manifold connection during this period with the physical destruction, flaying and exposure of the interiority of the human body.

The relationship between identity and representation is one that has an enduring existence throughout history. However, there was a cohesive dialogue between this new individualistic view of life and a realisation that invention and genius in the visual arts were properties of the artist's creative self during the Renaissance, when the status of the artist developed from that of craftsman to that of an autonomous individual, worthy of praise and capable of creating inspired work of a sublime quality. It became increasingly common to see pictorial style as self-expression during the Renaissance, when as Kim Woods states, there was 'a crucial shift from the artist as mere artisan belonging to a craft guild to the artist as a creative and learned personality, admired not just for acquired skills but also for innate ability (what we might today call talent or even genius)'.[358] An indication of the ways in which contemporary notions of the Renaissance artistic self as a unique, complex entity shaped a new awareness of the

[358] K. Woods, *The Changing Status of the Artist*, Yale, 1999, p. 7.

artist as an individual is strikingly evident in Marco d'Agrate's (1504-1574) sculpture of *St Bartholomew* (1562) for Milan cathedral (Figs.123-24).[359] Like many of his contemporaries, d'Agrate became progressively conscious of his identity as a creative intellectual with heightened self-esteem and as the deserver of acclaim during this period. D'Agrate deploys his knowledge of the inner body to not only serve his ability to represent the human figure correctly but also to enhance the status of his own art metaphysically and to use nature's construction as the model of his own creation. The grisly statue of the saint completely flayed of his skin bears the inscription '*I was not made by Praxiteles but by Marco d'Agrate*' on its base, thereby demonstrating that the artist wished to ensure correct attribution to himself alone by drawing attention to the fact that the sculpture was a creation of his own virtuosity. By correlating his skill in expressing the body's hidden truths with that of Praxiteles, who was the premier classical illuminator of the body's natural life and whose naturalistic work is recorded as inducing a physical response in its viewers, d'Agrate made his self-proclaimed virtuosity and ingenuity as an identifiable and individual artist explicitly clear. [360] Pliny's account of how a worshipper fell in love with Praxiteles' effigy of Venus was well known in the Renaissance, and d'Agrate seems be courting acknowledgment of his own ability to create a lifelike work of art that induced a physical response with his grisly flayed Saint Bartholomew:

> We spoke of the age of Praxiteles among the statuaries, but on the fame of his marble sculpture he surpassed even himself. Works of his are in Athens in the Ceramicus, but all leading works, not only by Praxiteles but throughout the world, is his Venus,

[359] Marco d'Agrate was an Italian sculptor, active mainly in Lombardy. He was born to a family of sculptors, and collaborated with his brother Gian Francesco in a monument to Sforzino Sforza found in Basilica of Santa Maria della Steccata in Parma. D'Agrate also worked on the tomb of Giovanni del Conte in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Milan, and for the facade of the Certosa of Pavia. (H.M. Wilson *Art Index*, Domus; August 1989, Issue 707, pp. i-ii, EBSCO host accessed 15th July 2013).
[360] A. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration*, Yale, 1990, pp. 277-81.

> which many have sailed to Cnidus to see. He had made two, which he offered for sale at the same time. One was draped, which was preferred by the Coan people, who had the right to a choice. Although he offered them either at the same price, they decided on the chaste and austere appearance in the draped one. The Cnidians bought the rejected Venus, which gained far greater fame. King Nicomedes later on wanted to buy her from the Cnidians, and promised to dissolve their entire public debt, which was huge. The people, however, preferred to suffer all their debts, and rightly so, for with that statue Praxiteles made Cnidus famous. The little building it is open on all sides, so that the image of the goddess can be viewed from any direction; it is believed that the goddess herself favoured this idea. The admiration of the statue does not slacken when viewed from any perspective. They tell of a certain man, seized with love for it, who sneaked in at night and climbed on it in passion, and whose lust is marked by a stain.[361]

Significantly, with his metaphor of naked truth, Marco d'Agrate inscribes his strident proclamation that his invention and genius are properties of his own artistic self on a subject portraying the flaying and effacement of Bartholomew's own identity inscribed skin. Just as the layers beneath the skin of his *Saint Bartholomew* are discovered and exposed in his sculpture, d'Agrate also seems to have been discovering and exposing his own newly elevated status as an individual artist worthy of acclamation and prestigious patronage.

Castration and the Unmanning of Manhood

Three drawings which have not to this day gained significant notable recognition in scholarship on the flaying topos are Giulio Romano's *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* (1527), Francesco Salviati's *The Flaying of* Marsyas (1537) and Parmigianino's *Apollo Overseeing the Flaying of Marsyas* (c.1527-30) (Figs.125-27). All three of these works

[361] Pliny, *Natural History* 36.4., pp. 20-3, cited in J. L. Hairston and W. Stephens, (eds.), *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, Baltimore, 2010, p. 246.

present a particularly malevolent means of punishment with their portrayal of an Apollo who appears to be concentrating his attention on the mutilation of Marsyas's male genitals.

Whereas flaying has almost no literal historical referent, we know from many classical and medieval textual sources that castration was sometimes used in warfare to torture, demoralise and debase one's enemies.[362] Castration was a way to biologically disempower those vanquished in warfare because it deprived the victim of his ability to procreate and thus ensured generational lineage belonged to the captor. It also conveniently extinguished opposing lineages and enabled sexual possession of their women by the victors. Evidence that castration was used for the emasculation of conquered adversaries was recorded on the, now lost, stone carving commemorating Sennacherib's siege of Lachish, Judea in 701 BCE stating: 'With the bodies of their warriors I filled the plain, like grass. Their testicles cut off, and tore out their privates like the seeds of cucumbers'.[363] Closer to the period under study is the use of castration reportedly occurred during the St Bartholomew's day massacre of 1572, when it is claimed that the French Catholics cut the genitals from wounded and dead Protestants.[364] The practice and condemnation of castration are featured in both mythological and religious history. In classical antiquity, the myth of Cybele, the goddess of fertility, whose male partner, Attis, was said to have castrated himself after his infidelity, was well known.[365] Judaism was strongly opposed to the practice of castration with the Torah specifically excluding eunuchs or any males with defective

[362] For an account of the history of castration, see M.S. Kuefler, 'Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages', in V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage, (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York, 1996, pp. 279-306.
[363] C. Ancillon, *Traité des Eunuques*, Paris, 1707, reprinted in 1978, p. 6.
[364] H. Nogueres, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, London, 1962, p. 136.
[365] See Bober and Rubenstein, 1986, p. 86. On the cult of Cybele and Attis' castration as an act of condemnation see E. Lane, (ed.) *Cybele, Attis, and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M.J. Vermaseren*, Brill, 1996 and M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: the Myth and the Cult*, London, 1977, pp. 77-8.

genitals from the priesthood, just as castrated animals were excluded from sacrifice.[366] Within the religious traditions of early Christianity, castration was officially prohibited, but from the seventeenth-century onwards generations of Italian boys were castrated in the hope that their voices, if prevented from breaking, would combine a child's high register with the vocal power of a man.[367]

Many early Christian councils and Church Fathers robustly condemned castration on biblical grounds, thereby proclaiming that such acts ran counter to God's laws. Biblical condemnation is found in Deuteronomy 23:1 which states: 'He whose testicles are crushed or whose member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord'. As early as the second century CE, Cyprian (200-258), the Bishop of Carthage, proclaimed that: 'Men are emasculated, and all their pride and vigour of their sex is effeminate in the disgrace of their enervated body; and he is most pleasing there who has most completely broken down the man into the woman'.[368] The 3rd century theologian Basil of Caeserea (330-379) issued the following diatribe on the matter:

> Neither feminine nor masculine, woman-mad,
> envious, of evil wage, quick to anger, effeminate,
> slaves of the belly, money-mad, coarse, grumbling
> about their dinner, fickle, stingy, ready to accept
> anything, disgusting, crazed, jealous –and yet why
> say more? At their very birth doomed to the knife!
> How can their mind be right when their very feet are
> twisted? They are chaste (thanks to the knife), and it
> is no credit to them; and they are lecherous without
> fruition (thanks to their own natural vileness).[369]

[366] Passages from the scriptures which refer to castration are Lev 22:24, Lev 21:20, Deuteronomy 23:1 and Matthew 19:12.
[367] For a history of castrati, see J. Rosselli, 'The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850', *Acta Musicologica*, LX, 1998, pp. 143-79. Also see V. Finucci, *The Many Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, Durham and London, 2003, pp. 226-80.
[368] Cyprian Epistles, 1:18, trans. E. Wallis, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V, 1886, p. 277.
[369] Basil of Caesarea, *The Letters*, ed. R. J. Deffari, 4 vols. 91926, Letter CXV, p. 230.

According to the influential Church Father, Augustine of Hippo (354-430), castration blurred the distinction between man and woman: 'what then doth all that which remained of him after his gelding signify? Whither is that referred? What is the meaning of that now?' [370] However, the retributive manner in which Apollo appears to be mutilating his adversary's manhood finds its closest parallel in the fate of the theologian Peter Abelard (1079 -1142), who relates in his *Historia Calamitatum*, that he was humiliatingly castrated by the family of his lover, Heloise, as retribution for making her pregnant:

> Violently incensed, they laid a plot against me, and one night while I all unsuspecting was asleep in a secret room in my lodgings, they broke in with the help of one of my servants whom they had bribed. There they had vengeance on me with a most cruel and most shameful punishment, such as astounded the whole world; for they cut off those parts of my body with which I had done that which was the cause of their sorrow. This done, straightaway they fled, but two of them were captured and suffered the loss of their eyes and their genital organs…In truth I felt the disgrace more than the hurt to my body, and was more afflicted with shame than with pain. My incessant thought was of the renown in which I had so much delighted, now brought low, nay, utterly blotted out, so swiftly by an evil chance. I saw, too, how justly God had punished me in that very part of my body whereby I had sinned. I perceived that there was indeed justice in my betrayal by him whom I had myself already betrayed; and then I thought how eagerly my rivals would seize upon this manifestation of justice, how this disgrace would bring bitter and enduring grief to my kindred and my friends, and how the tale of this amazing outrage would spread to the very ends of the earth.
>
> What path lay open to me thereafter? How could I ever again hold up my head among men, when every finger should be pointed at me in scorn, every tongue speak my blistering shame, and when I should be a monstrous spectacle to all eyes? I was overwhelmed by the remembrance that, according to

[370] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, V, p. 127.

> the dread letter of the law, God holds eunuchs in such abomination that men thus maimed are forbidden to enter a church, even as the unclean and filthy; nay, even beasts in such plight were not acceptable as sacrifices. Thus in Leviticus (xxii. 24) is it said: "Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which hath its stones bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut." And in Deuteronomy (xxiii. 1), "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord.[371]

The notion of castration as punishment is emergent in both Abelard's case and the scenes depicted in these drawings. Once the locus of male fertility and male pleasure is amputated in an act of retribution and punishment, the victim becomes only a short step removed from the status of gelded domesticated animals. As if to further emphasise this association, in *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* Giulio Romano depicts Marsyas hung from a tree in an inverted position that is customarily associated with the skinning of animals (Fig.125). As a satyr who was half-man and half-goat already, the treatment of Marsyas in this way eradicates all vestiges of his humanity and it seems Romano chooses to reiterate the animalistic traits in the satyr's physicality by imbuing Marsyas with cloven hooves and a tail. Here, Apollo is depicted as if he is disrobing the satyr in the same way an animal's hide is removed from its suspended carcass at its slaughter, thereby blurring the distinction between human and animal. Thus, the impression that Marsyas is about to be both flayed and castrated becomes intricately enmeshed with the notion of judicial punishment, the domestication of livestock, slavery and other forms of extreme domination. Furthermore, we are reminded that in animal husbandry removing the testes of young male animals such as bulls, horses, pigs and sheep controls breeding and

[371] P. Abelard,' Historia Calamitatum', *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. B. Radice, London, 1974, p. 77.

produces less aggressive males who are accordingly easier to manage. But it is the manner in which Giulio depicts the god's assistant staring so intently at Marsyas' genitals with an unsheathed knife ominously posed as if about to carry out the act of castration that would perhaps have carried the most powerful message for Renaissance males. The knife is posed at the sensitive genital area, infusing the scene with a latent component of aggressive emasculation. Moreover, as if literally stripping Marsyas of his identity is not reprisal enough, Apollo punishes his adversary in a way that reiterates complete possession of his vanquished contender. For a culture which believed that to be not properly male presumes one could not be properly human, Apollo's violation of Marsyas's manhood would have presented Renaissance audiences with the worst loss that men could imagine. Giulio's *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* explicitly evokes the connection that existed at this time between the desecration of male bodily integrity and infamy or dishonour in the minds of a Renaissance audience because it archetypically and paradigmatically designates loss and impotence with the removal of an organ that was itself potent and intact. With his dismemberment of Marsyas' genitalia, together with the flaying of his hide, the god is depicted humiliating his foe spectacularly and fatally. We can, perhaps then, see the representational potency of Marsyas suffering castration as a significant expression of the value given at this time to the sexually intact male body. What appears to be depicted in this drawing is the anomaly of the unmanned man - a concept which would have altered Renaissance sexual norms and challenged the contemporary meaning of manhood.

Similarly, in both Salviati's *The Flaying of Marsyas* and Parmigianino's *Apollo Overseeing the Flaying of Marsyas*, we again find the suggestion that Apollo is about to castrate Marsyas in order to carry out his extreme and inexpiable revenge against his contender's audacious challenge (Figs.126-7). Although the act of castration is less

explicitly portrayed than in the Giulio Romano drawing, Apollo's superiority is stridently demonstrated with the threat that the god has the power to desexualise his foe. In Salvaiti's drawing, Apollo kneels with direct concentration focused on the genitalia of his foe who is wearing only a loin-cloth, and is at the leering god's mercy (Fig.126). In Parmigianino's variant, the god oversees the execution of his revengeful act on the again suspended and inverted Marsyas as his assistant is depicted pointing directly at the satyr's penis (Fig.127). Similarly to Romano's drawing, this Marsyas is depicted as a goat with his haunches and hooves ignobly spread as if, perhaps, to emphasise the loss of maleness or humanity that castration will bring about, Parmigianino leaves the viewer with the overriding impression that this is a beast awaiting slaughter by emphasising his animalistic rather than human side. It also reiterates the concept that a gelded half-man is no man at all and reiterates mankind's superiority over the uncultivated nature of the beasts. Furthermore, as if making a symbolic return to the humiliation Marsyas received in the contest, Marsyas is posed just like the flute which Apollo duped him into playing upside-down and is positioned as useless and absurd with his legs spread in a feminising manner. These works portray the theatre of Marsyas's castration in a manner that would have had uncomfortable and alarming resonance for contemporary males because amputating manhood produces a 'non-man' and creates a creature of ambiguous gender. Renaissance notions of sexual difference relied heavily on the absoluteness of the divide between male and female and clear categories of manliness and unmanliness were central to sustaining the link between masculinity, virtue, moral excellence and social privilege. Given the period's correlation between gender and authority, all three of these drawings, with their suggestion that Marsyas is about to have his masculine identity brought into question, could have served an explicitly symbolic purpose connected to contemporary cultural anxieties or

concerns for the implications of losing sexual and cultural virility or dominance. Considered this way as both a real and a symbolic event, it is conceivable that these representations of Marsyas's genital mutilation, which made him unmanly both in a moral and anatomical sense, were connected to a larger metaphorical strategy cautioning against social or political emasculation by potential personal or civic adversaries. Consequently, in a world where the social construction of manhood as phallic and generative needed to be upheld, the rhetorical function of Marsyas' castration, as an emblem of corporeal vulnerability and the removal of the symbolic attribute of power, may have held wider cultural implications for masculine identity and its fears of being degraded, subjugated, dispossessed or made insignificant and ungenerative.

The Theatre of Pain and Punishment

A different set of cultural assumptions concerning the skin and its removal from the body invites our exploration in the two didactically assertive oil paintings executed by Gerard David in 1498 of *The Judgement of Cambyses* and *The Flaying of Sisamnes* (Figs.128-29)**.** For this commission, David deploys an ancient Persian legend from the sixth century BCE in two panels where a corrupt judge, Sisamnes, was flayed by King Cambyses after accepting a bribe. Sisamnes was arrested and punished by the flaying of all of his skin which was then strung on the chair upon which he had sat to deliver his judgements. To replace Sisamnes whom he killed and flayed, the king appointed Sisamnes' son, Otanes, as the new judge and installed him on the newly reupholstered bench where he was expected to bear in mind his father's fate as he heard evidence, deliberated and delivered his just decisions. The legend first originated in the fifth book

of Herodotus's *Historiae* (c.440 BCE).[372] A later version was published in the 13th century compilation of anecdotes and tales called the *Gesta Romanorum*:

> The sentence was immediately executed, and the skin of the culprit nailed upon the seat of judgement, as an awful warning to others to avoid a similar offence. The emperor afterwards bestowed the same dignity upon the son of the deceased judge, and on presenting the appointment said: Thou wilt sit, to administer justice, upon the skin of thy delinquent sire: should anyone incite them to do evil, remember his fate; look down upon thy father's skin, lest his fate befall thee.[373]

A French version of this manuscript, which was housed in the Cistercian abbey of Der Duinen near Bruges, follows the translation produced at the end of the fourteenth century by Symon de Hesdin and Nycolas de Gonesse:

> Cambyses acted with unaccustomed severity, for he ordered the flaying of a bad judge and had his skin stretched on the Judgement seat. And he made the man's son a judge. And thus the barbarian king [ensured] by new and marvellous means that no judge would ever again be corrupted.[374]

Although my research field is primarily focused on the Italian Renaissance, these images and their foundational texts make an important contribution to our understanding of the popularity of the flaying theme in Italian visual culture. Bruges was a terminus of important long distance trade routes at this time and works produced by artists from north of the Alps became a highly desirable export commodity.[375] As a result, artists from the North responded to this high demand either through export or emigration. This meant that a dynamic artistic interchange of connections and networks

[372] Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Greene, Chicago, 1987.
[373] *Gesta Romanorum*, trans. C. Swan, 1905, revised W. Hooper, London, 2012, pp. 62-3.
[374] This French translation was completed in I402 and a printed edition appeared before the end of the century. See M. Meiss, *French painting in the time of Jean de Berry: the Limbourgs and their contemporaries*, New York, I974, p. 62.
[375] P. Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 8-9.

operated between European artistic centres in response to this growth in international trade and migrated to other cities such as Florence.[376] This cultural interaction brought about shifting boundaries where ideas and narratives spread, changed and developed as artists came into contact with each other. It follows, therefore, that although the depiction of the act of flaying before the isolated 1571 Bragadin case in Venice has virtually no historical basis, Italian artists travelling north of the Alps in search of work might have become familiar with, or at least heard of, these particular panels. Indeed, these favourable trade, diplomatic and economic networks might have helped to circulate the robust metaphorical power of this subject further afield.[377]

In 1498, David was commissioned by the aldermen of Bruges to paint two panels depicting this tale and the completed works were to be installed in the chambers of the aldermen in the town hall as a didactic message that the city expected them to uphold the duty to deliver justice free of corruption or interference from outside financial interests. The edifying message of both these paintings is clear: in the first panel, Sisamnes is exposed as the guilty judge who corrupted the body politic and, in the second, he is suffering the violation of the integrity of his own corporeal boundary. With dimensions of 202 x 350cm, which were significantly larger than most Flemish paintings and installed in a moderately sixed room of 8 x 6 meters, the resonances and intensities this pair of images would have produced in the minds of its audience would surely have been both intimidating and compelling.

[376] For an account of cultural diffusion and artistic dissemination between Italy and the North, see C. Harbison, *The Art of the Northern Renaissance*, Oxford, 2012. The impact of the exchange of artistic ideas during the Renaissance is discussed in C. Richardson, *Locating Renaissance Art*, Princeton, 2007.
[377] On Netherlandish artistic networks, see, Richardson, 2007, pp. 65-99. For discussion of David's foreign commissions, see P. Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500*, New Haven and London, 2004, p. 72.

David gives primacy in the first panel to the scene of Sisamnes' dramatic arrest by the King, and presents, in the background on the left and seen through the arch of the loggia, Sisamnes' crime taking place (Fig.130). This detail of the corrupt judge accepting from a litigant or servant a purse of money as the bribe depicts the offence that will seal his horrific fate. The arrest of Sisamnes occurs before a group of witnesses, some of whom could perhaps be portraits of the current Bruges aldermen, to reiterate the public disgrace that the judge's betrayal had brought to the whole town. In the second panel, the immoral Sisamnes suffers the horrific act of having his skin flayed as a punitive act of capital punishment that seems intended to advance a distinctive edifying and moralistic socio-political agenda. In the upper right of the painting David depicts this flayed hide taken from the corrupt judge placed upon the seat of justice (Fig.131). Another group of bystanders witness Sisamnes' flaying to reiterate that it was a betrayal of the trust of the people of Bruges which changed the course of justice. Their presence in this salutary tale reminds the viewer that justice, which Sisamnes perverted, was a gift from the public and that acceptance of a bribe would sin against the populace as justice belonged to the people not the immoral judge. The representational status of flaying is not the embodiment of material reality here but is instead used to convey moral exhortation through the strict ideological remit that integrity and the discovery of truth are overriding principles in relation to justice and public authority.

Of particular note for this chapter is how in this first panel of *The Judgement of Cambyses*, David presages Sisamnes' gruesome fate in the form of two medallions measuring approximately 29 x 18cms which are painted in high relief and flank the judge's throne. The roundel on the left has attracted some scholarly debate and is

generally thought to be of Ceres and Triptolemus (Fig.132).[378] No one, however, has yet offered an explanation for the identification of this roundel's subject as Ceres and Triptolemus, but in my opinion David's inclusion of this narrative has relevance because according to Greek mythology, the goddess Demeter (who was renamed Ceres by the Romans) was not only the goddess of agriculture but also patron and protector of plebian laws, rights and tribunes.[379] Ceres had the ability to interrupt the cycle of agriculture necessary for sustaining life and supporting civilisation. Ceres' Aventine temple served the plebeians as its legal archive, treasury and possibly law-court, and the lives and property of violators of this law were expected to pay forfeit to Ceres as the patron goddess of Rome's written laws. Furthermore, according to Ovid (*Metamorphoses* Book V), Triptolemus was one of the men who had great power and honor in Eleusis and was one of the chiefs among its people who were known to have protected the city by their wisdom and true Judgements. Triptolemus was sent by Ceres to teach the people cultivation and civilisation. The story of Sisamnes' corrupt Judgement provided a negative exemplum of the consequences of transgressing the conventions defining civilised humankind in a way that evoked the disastrous consequences of contravening the moral and existential boundaries of human aspiration in the ancient myth of Ceres and Triptolemus. With his inclusion of this particular ancient *Ceres and Triptolemus* narrative in the roundel above Sisamnes' head, David is surely visually alluding to the shared theme of the importance of restoring and maintaining just administration. The presence of putti holding garlands of bountiful fruit and vegetation beneath the civic emblems of the city can also be read as further reference to the association of Ceres with cultivation, civilization and just government.

[378] H. J. van Miegroet, 'Gerard David's Justice of Cambyses: Exemplum Iustitiae or Political Allegory?' *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1988, pp. 125-7.
[379] See A. Room, *Who's Who in Classical Mythology*, London, 1990, pp. 89-90. Also *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. J. Cashford, London, 2003, p. 24.

The reference to Ceres and Triptolemus in this roundel makes the affinity between the myth and the opprobrium of Sisamnes clear:

> Straightaway, Demeter [Ceres] made the tilled and fecund earth bear fruit; the entirety of the vast earth became heavy with plants and flowers. She went to teach- to the kings who administer justice. To Triptolemus and to Diocles, the able horseman, to the powerful Eumolpus and to Celeus the leader of the people - the celebration of sacred rites; she revealed to them the beautiful mysteries …, the august acts that it is impossible to transgress, to uncover, to divulge.[380]

In the other roundel on the right, David depicts a rather gender ambiguous or hermaphroditic Apollo who is holding a stringed instrument, accompanied by a figure of Marsyas tied to a tree and a smaller figure of Olympus (Fig.133).[381] Apollo's pose, together with the presence of Marsyas and Olympus, confirms that the models for the painted plaquettes derive from copies of an intaglio from Lorenzo Medici's collection of antique gems. These are likely to be the two extant Florentine casts of Lorenzo's intaglios which are now in Washington's Kress Collection identified as *Medallion with Apollo and Marsyas* and *Medallion with Ceres and Triptolemus after the antique* (Figs.134-35).[382] The 15th century cast of *Apollo and Marsyas* appears to have been taken from an antique carnelian gem portraying *Apollo, Marsyas and Olympus* now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples which was mounted by Ghiberti around 1428 for Cosimo de' Medici (Fig.136).[383] It has been suggested by Otto von Simson that the painter must have known the subject of the medallions but there is no

[380] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 471-82, trans. R. D. Woodard, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 263-4.
[381] See N. Turner et al, (eds.), *European Drawings, Volume III* of the J. Paul Getty Museum Catalogue, Los Angeles, 1998, p. 147.
[382] J. Pope-Hennessy, *Renaissance bronzes from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: reliefs, plaquettes, statuettes, utensils and mortars*, Washington, 1965, p. 73.
[383] Inv.26051; Bober and Rubinstein, 1986, no. 31.

explanation offered for why David painted such a feminine Apollo.[384] However, this feminised Apollo is not unique, with a similarly androgynous Apollo appearing later in Jan Gossaert's drawing of the *Apollo Citharoedus of the Casa Sassi* (1509) (Fig. 137).[385] This gender ambiguous Apollo motif may also have been available to David through other drawings that converted the god into a woman. A figure of a woman posed as the Apollo on Lorenzo's intaglio appears in a 15th century drawing acquired by the J. Paul Getty museum, which carries the appellation *A Female Figure Holding a Cithara* (Fig. 138). This Getty figure displays similarly androgynous features to that of the Apollo in the lozenge featured in David's painting with its appearance of taut pectorals, masculine chest, small waist, curving hips and female pudenda. In addition, the pose, together with the way the musical instrument is held and the hairstyle, with its central parting and long flowing locks, are all elements which also bear a striking resemblance to the Apollo in the aforementioned cast of the Medici intaglio. This supposition seems to be confirmed by the fact that the smaller scaled figure of a male on the bottom right of this sheet parallels the similar but reversed pose of Triptolemus in the Kress *Ceres and Triptolemus* medallion. It would seem that the appearance of the two Medicean images of *Ceres and Triptolemus* and *Apollo and Marsyas* here as roundels in David's painting, places the Sisamnes narrative within the same edifying sphere of the Ovidian myth of Apollo and Marsyas with its own discourses of judgement, sentencing and execution. In addition, they also offer a pictorial acknowledgement of Bruges' recent connection to the Medici banking system which

[384] O. Von Simson, 'Gerard David's Gerechtigkeitsbild und der Spatmittelalterliche Humanismus' in F. Piel and J. Traeger, (eds.), *Festschrift Wolfgang Braunfels*, Tubingen, 1977, pp. 349-56, cited in H. van der Velden, 'Cambyses reconsidered: Gerard David's exemplum institae for Bruges Town Hall' in *Simolus*, 23 (1), 1995, pp. 40-62.
[385] M. J. Friedländer, *From van Eyck to Bruegel*, London, 1981, p. 98.

was newly opened in the city.[386] With his representation strategies for the second panel of *The Flaying of Sisamnes,* David seems to intentionally provoke a response of anxiety within the viewer, potentially as a view to social directive. The allegorising narrative of Sisamnes' fate is heavily dependent on cultural assumptions concerning the skin and its removal from the body. This effect is heightened by the way the artist dedicates the majority of the painting's pictorial space to the punishment of the transgressive judge with particular emphasis on its violence. As in the depictions of the myth of Apollo and Marsyas we have studied so far, the act of flaying is the most compelling aspect of the composition, thereby making explicit the association between transgression, skin, pain and punishment. When David gives centrality to the flaying of the still alive body of the denounced judge, he instils a commanding reaction over the viewer and exploits a sense of realism by drawing the viewer into the scene. The youth who looks out at the viewer, also constructs an affective relationship between the spectator and the punitive act. The unspeakable torment of the act is made all the more disturbing in the way it is undertaken in such a matter of fact manner, with everyone else apart from this one figure of the boy concentrating on the business in hand.

Clearly, moral authority provides the narrative framework on which the story of Sisamnes' flaying is suspended in David's *The Judgement of Cambyses* and *The Flaying of Sisamnes.* David engages the power dynamics of spectacular suffering in his paintings in order to demonstrate, in both a literal and symbolic manner, the supremacy of authority over corruption and injustice. But perhaps the most disturbing feature is not the gruesome public execution of the judge by the means of flaying. This grisly allegorical embodiment of justice and punishment by itself would have provoked abject

[386] On the history of the Medici bank in Bruges which was founded in 1439 and liquidated in 1478, see R. De Roover, *Il Banco Medici dale Origini al Decline,* Florence, 1970, pp. 502-78.

revulsion of Sisamnes' heinous torture but the message gains an even more powerful impetus in the top right corner of David's panel. Here, the denounced judge's own newly elected son is installed upon the vacated seat of justice which is now draped in his corrupt father's flayed skin. With rhetorical and didactic goals seemingly in mind, David suggests that, both metaphorically and materially, just rule and the letter of the law have now been re-inscribed onto the parchment that encased the new judge's dishonest father and predecessor's identity. Viewers are thus directed toward the unequivocal symbolic importance of the meaning that is generated out of Sisamnes' flaying and its significance for the establishment and maintenance of social order. When David portrays the skin being stripped so degradingly from the immoral Sisamnes and then deploys it as material support for the seat of Bruges' just administration, he creates an edifying touchstone for the elaboration and reiteration of an important ethical civic model. In rendering Sisamnes' flaying as a meaningful moral allegory, David's commission for the city's own seat of civic justice produced a legible and intelligible narrative that inculcated social, political and ethical values in a manner that was seen and staged for maximum impact.

It is this restoration of existing social order achieved through the extreme means of flaying which unites Sisamnes who dishonoured the dignity of his judge's office by his acceptance of bribes, Bartholomew who committed the sacrilegious act of converting the brother of a king to another faith and Marsyas who dared to challenge the divine power of Apollo. All of these flayed individuals presented a fundamental challenge to the power relations of their dominant societies. Marsyas, Sisamnes, Bartholomew were perceived as explicitly violating the existing social order with law-breaking acts of subordination. This suggests that, by contrast to the existing literature which propounds interpretative modes based upon the paradigmatic Platonic symbol of

spiritual liberation, Renaissance depictions of the flayed body often functioned as part of a moralistic and didactic strategy that held imaginary and symbolic importance for the establishment and maintenance of social and civic identity.

Apollo, the Anatomist and the Internal Gaze

Renaissance fascination with the representation of flaying can also be read in direct connection with the history of anatomy because this was the era when new understanding of the human body resulting from anatomical studies was pursued with intensity probably unequalled at any time earlier.[387] By comparing a selection of images depicting sufferers of ignominious deaths through flaying with a range of works that address the study of anatomy in a pedagogical context, it is possible to gain a closer understanding of how public anatomy lessons and dissections were related at this time to not only the history of medical research and teaching but also to the history of infamy and punishment. As we have seen in the above reading of the violence of Sisamnes fate, the spectacle of his flaying is theatrically transformed into a moral exemplum in the service of restoring social balance and a just healthy body politic. However, David's emphasis on the performativity character of *The Flaying of Sisamnes* image also finds a parallel in Bartolomeo Passerotti's *Michelangelo Conducting an Anatomy Lesson* (1570) where the structure and composition of the work recalls David's painting in striking ways (Fig.139). This drawing demonstrates the extent to which Michelangelo saw anatomical verisimilitude as a fundamental skill of the sculptor's craft and how he applied what he learned to the modelling of the male figure. According to Vasari, Michelangelo had experience in the field of dissection and was a member of a confraternity offering spiritual comfort and burial to criminals facing the death

[387] For an account of the history of anatomy in the Renaissance, see A. R. Hall, *The Revolution in Science 1500-1750*, London, 1983, pp. 39-53.

penalty.[388]This mastery of the study of nature through anatomical study was believed to be the proving ground of figural expertise for artists during the Renaissance, as this explicit statement from Lorenzo Ghiberti in 1447 reveals:

> It is further necessary to have studied the discipline of medicine and to have witnessed dissections, so that the sculptor may know how many bones are in the human body. Wishing to compose a male statue, the sculptor must know how many muscles are in the body of a man, and also the nerves and sinews in it.[389]

However, the single most pivotal connection between public dissections and public execution was the criminal since it was the cadavers of executed convicts that were used for empirical dissection during the Renaissance. Just as David underscored the dramatic quality of the Sisamnes' story and drew attention to its elements of performance, spectacle and visuality, the same manifold connection between honour and physical destruction exists in Passerotti's drawing of Michelangelo partitioning and opening the human body for anatomical study. Public dissections and public executions shared this aspect of spectacular violence, and this becomes apparent when we examine how both the scene of Passerotti's anatomical theatre and David's portrayal of Sisamnes' flaying appear to be staged as spectacles of the violated body and of the ravages of pain. Closer examination of these works reveals how they both take as their principle subjects extreme practices which use flaying to transgress the margins of the human body. This association is further emphasised by the way Sisamnes' horizontally positioned body is flayed alive on a table in a manner which formally assimilates the composition with that of the dissection in *Michelangelo Conducting an Anatomy Lesson*. The composition is structured so that the viewer is drawn into the scene which

[388] Vasari-Milanese, *Vite*, vii, pp. 268-9.
[389] L. Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, intro. and ed. Lorenzo Bartoli, Florence, 1998, p. 48, translated and cited in J. L. Hairston and W. Stephens, (eds.), *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, Baltimore, 2010, p. 244.

takes places in the central mid-ground of both these works. Both the spectacle of Sisamnes' flaying and that of the dissection of Michelangelo's cadaver are encircled by groups of engrossed bystanders and several of these figures stand as if transfixed as they confront the grisly scene whilst others interact with each other as they witness two protagonists engrossed in the grisly task in hand. This shared iconography suggests that a clear unifying principle exists between David's judicial spectacle of Sisamnes' flaying and artistic renderings of the anatomist's theatrical dissection.[390] There is little to distinguish between these medical and judicial scenes, with the resemblance between executioner and the artist / anatomist further blurring the distinction between an execution and a dissection. The fact that Sisamnes was depicted as being subjected to flaying as a punishment for his crimes cements this pictorial association with the image of Michelangelo dissecting the condemned criminal who is similarly subjected to the fate of having his body eviscerated. As Edgerton points out: 'The condemned criminal, whose body in life harboured evil and caused harm, now in death beneficially serves mankind by being made available for the advancement of medical science. Anatomisation of the criminal is in fact a sort of sacrament; the dissector himself assumes the role of transubstantiator'.[391] This correspondence between anatomy and penal flaying establishes a potent cultural association between capital punishment and the medical production of anatomical knowledge, thus making the step from public punishment in David's *The Flaying of Sisamnes* to public dissection in Passerotti's *Michelangelo Conducting an Anatomy Lesson* considerably shorter. Furthermore, just as

[390] For similarities between execution and dissection and their common concern with honour, see K. Park, 'The criminal and the saintly body', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 47, no.1, 1994, pp. 1-33.
[391] S. Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*, London, 1985, p. 213.

the flayed Marsyas becomes Apollo's victim for his wrongdoing, the Renaissance criminal is flayed at the hands of the anatomist as the result of his transgressions.

This close connection between the production of knowledge and the artistic record of anatomical flaying began with Andreas Vesalius's (1514-54) work in anatomy at the University of Padua in the early decades of the sixteenth century. As the human body became the main locus of knowledge and understanding through the combination of experimental, practical exploration and traditional textual learning, a new relationship developed between the production of knowledge and artistic representation of anatomy.[392] Dissection and discovery made the realm under the skin more visible as awareness emerged of how within the body's interior there lay an awesome truth that could only be revealed by flaying. Vesalius was the most impressive contributor to the study of human anatomy and on the title page of *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the Fabric of the Human Body), 1543, the anatomist flays the body and penetrates its depths in order to discover new knowledge of the nature of human beings and to reveal and record the truth concealed within (Fig.140).[393] This frontispiece to Vesalius' treatise demonstrates how the increasingly visual and pedagogical orientation of the anatomists relied on artists to record their findings in images. Furthermore, it exemplifies how the study of human anatomy contributed to a new field of medical illustration; one where the representation of the anatomised human body took on a more artistically creative form that closely united art and science.

The most strident pictorial connection between these revolutionary advances in anatomical discovery and the Ovidian myth of Apollo flaying Marsyas is to be found in

[392] A useful account of Vesalius and Renaissance anatomical study is to be found in C. M. Saunders and C. D. O'Malley, (eds.), *The Illustrations of Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, New York, 1973.
[393] A. Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, translated by W. F. Richardson and J. B. Carman, 5 vols., San Francisco and Novato, 1998.

the 1555 (second edition) of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* treatise. It is significant that in this foundational text, Vesalius uses the Ovidian myth in the form of a historiated initial 'V' to signify his own name (Fig.141). The competition between Apollo and Marsyas takes place in the far background between the letter 'V' where two seated protagonists are portrayed as playing their respective musical instruments, whilst two classically dressed muses point to a similarly attired Apollo who wields a knife at the throat of a naked Marsyas suspended by his arms from a tree. Of note here is how Apollo's knife in this instance is poised at the point that an anatomist might commence his incision on a cadaver. The importance given to the Apollo and Marsyas myth by Vesalius seems to suggest that the anatomist recognised the association between Apollo's actions and those who flayed the body and penetrates its depths in order to discover new knowledge of the nature and construction of human beings.

This parallel between the flaying of Marsyas and removal of the skin in a punitive context with themes of dissection and discovery of the inner principles of the body's construction was articulated a decade earlier in Charles Estienne's illustration *De dissection* (1545) for his treatise *De dissection partium corporis humani* (Fig.142).[394] Here, a male figure has been suspended from a tree with the opened abdomen exposing the inner organs in a manner that is reminiscent of Ovid's narrative of Marsyas' agony:

> And, as Apollo punished him, he cried, "Ah-h-h!
> Why are you now tearing me apart? A flute has not
> the value of my life!" Even as he shrieked out in his
> agony, his living skin was ripped off from his limbs,
> till his whole body was a flaming wound, with
> nerves and veins and viscera exposed.[395]

[394] See J. Sawday, 'The Fate of Marsyas: Dissecting the Renaissance Body', in L. Gent and N. Llewellyn, (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture, c. 1540-1660*, London, 1990, pp. 112-35.
[395] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, p. 315.

This implicit relationship between Apollo flaying Marsyas and the anatomist's dissection of his subject in Estienne's illustration again suggests that the removal of Marsyas' skin could have been perceived as emblematic of this production of knowledge of the inner principles of the body's construction. Such a close and direct connection between Apollo flaying Marsyas and the anatomist's dissection of his subject is further established in the *écorché* figure illustration by Gaspar Becerra (1520–1570) in Juan Valverde de Amusco's *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano* (1556) (Fig.143).[396] Becerra's anatomical representation of the body with the skin removed foreshadows the later engraving of *Apollo Flaying Marsyas* by Melchior Meier (Fig.144), previously discussed, where Apollo takes on the pose of Becerra's *écorché* as he holds Marsyas's skin before a donkey-eared Midas. In each of these images, not only is the unity between flayer and flayed dissolved but they both have at their disposal the skin of the figure who has been flayed. In Becerra's *écorché* illustration, flayer and flayed are consolidated into one figure that appears to have just skinned itself. As if to moderate the boundary breeching act of dissection, this *écorché* is portrayed holding up his own flayed hide in one hand and in the other, the knife with which he has performed the deed. In a paradox where he is the one holding the knife, this gives the impression that the flayed figure is still alive and that skin is just a protective but removable covering. The display of skin and musculature in this animated fashion abrogates the fatality of flaying but traces a striking parallel with Meier's *Apollo Flaying Marsyas*, where Apollo, in a similar disturbing exhibitionist gesture as triumphant victor, parades the flayed skin of his vanquished contender.

[396] For an account of écorché illustrations in anatomy, see J. Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, London and New York, 1995, pp. 112-18 and 184-8.

The specific iconography of flaying presents opportunities for the exploration of certain pictorial strategies being developed in anatomical drawings during the Renaissance with regard to representation of the *écorché* or dissected body. One characteristic of Renaissance anatomical illustrations is the inclusion of the *écorché* within a pastoral landscape setting, rather than *in situ* on a dissection table. In Vesalius' illustrations on pages 174, 200 & 170 of the first edition of *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), a flayed figure demonstrating the body's musculature is walking upright as if dead yet undead (Figs.145-47). Moreover, in these illustrations, Vesalius' *écorchés* are posed against a distant townscape in the background as if to suggest that these figures have departed the social world to which they no longer belong. As in the case of *Dissected figure in a landscape* from Charles Estienne's *De Dissectione partium corporis* (1545), they now live in an isolated Arcadian landscape as inhabitants of their own community on the threshold of life and death (Fig.148). There is a motif of temporal suspense in these illustrations where the fate of the punished criminal is suspended betwixt heaven and hell as if lingering in earthly purgatorial limbo. Moreover, in illustrations such as those by Adrianus Spigelius (1578 –1625) for his *De humani corporis fabrica libri X tabulis aere icisis exornati* (c.1595), the cadaver seems to participate in its own internal inspection by playing an active role in the dissection process (Figs.149-50). This contradiction in logic (whether acknowledged by the viewer or not) is the one of the elements that has made these *écorché* images so compelling. It is possible, however, that within the broader theological frameworks and expansive historical legacies of Renaissance culture, these portrayals of *écorchés* who participate in their own dissection for the progress of human knowledge, were considered to have offered the ultimate act of penance. One might take the argument a step further and suggest that these wandering cadavers who have been abstracted from their humanity

but who now offer self-revelation and pedagogical knowledge may have encoded didactic lessons allegorising that to cast off one's corporeal shell of the skin is to cast off one's earthly sins.

Bodies alive and dead have always been a prominent feature in Christianity but in 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council debated the meaning of bodily resurrection and whether the body in heaven existed in a different form to the earthly body. As Walker Bynum observes: 'Dead bodies remained central to religious practice, and the oxymoronic terms 'impassive body' and 'incorruptible matter' were repeatedly defended as being at the heart of the Christian promise'.[397] The body's transience and its sacramental relationship to the soul pertains to the well-articulated theological structures of analogy, of microcosm and macrocosm, of temporality and eternity that can be traced back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor.15:35), 'but some will ask: ''How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'' '. According to Paul, at the Second Coming of Christ, He will replace the worn-out physical body with a new spiritual body:

> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man (1 Cor.15).

[397] C. Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, New York, 1995, p. 231.

There have been different concepts of the relation of the soul to the body, and numerous ideas about when the soul comes into existence and when and if it dies. Augustine of Hippo spoke of the soul and its relation to the body but proclaimed that although body and soul were separate, it was not possible to conceive of a soul without its body. Making clear the split between the material and the immaterial, Augustine of Hippo states:

> The point of time in which the souls of the good and evil are separated from the body, are we to say it is after death, or in death rather? If it is after death, then it is not death which is good or evil, since death is done with and past, but it is the life which the soul has now entered on. Death was an evil when it was present, that is to say, when it was being suffered by the dying; for to them it brought with it a severe and grievous experience, which the good make a good use of. But when death is past, how can that which no longer is be either good or evil? [398]

The redemptive potential of the body-soul duality was of prime importance in the Middle Ages.[399] Thomas Aquinas returned to the Greek philosophers' concept of the soul as a motivating principle of the body, which he saw as independent but requiring the substance of the body to make an individual. According to Aquinas' philosophy, while a human is a single material substance, it still should be understood as having a material soul which continues after bodily death: 'In complex substances there are form and matter, as in [humans] there are soul and body…the existence of the compound substance is not of form alone nor of matter alone but of the composed thing itself '.[400]

[398] Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Book XIII, Chapter IV, 532, W.M. Green, Cambridge, Mass., 1989.
[399] See C. Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, New York, 1992, pp. 239-97.
[400] Thomas Aquinas, 'On Being and Essence', trans. Ralph McInerny, *Selected Writings by Thomas Aquinas*, London, 1998, p. 36.

No persuasive scholarly argument has been adduced on whether these animated *écorché* figures were understood by the Renaissance viewer to be soliciting deliverance from eternal punishment for their crimes. However, the notion that salvation was represented by bodily wholeness and that damnation was associated with decay and partition appears in several early-modern Last Judgement scenes where the bodies of the Elect are reassembled as whole but the Damned are left fragmented in Hell. In the twelfth-century Byzantine mosaic of the *Last Judgement* in Santa Maria Assunta di Torcello in Venice, there is visual reiteration of the doctrine that the body raises intact for the resurrection (Figs.151-53).[401] Here, material resurrection is depicted through the restoration of the human body and positioned mid-way on the left of the scene, carrion birds, animals and fishes are depicted regurgitating consumed body fragments in preparation for its ascension to Heaven. In the bottom right, the sins of the Damned are symbolically represented by the juxtaposition of bodily fragmentation, missing limbs, decayed skulls and decapitated heads. This association between salvation and the enfleshing of the incorrupt body appears again in Luca Signorelli's fresco of *The Last Judgement* (1499-1504) in Orvieto Cathedral and Jean Bellegambe's *Last Judgement* panel (1520) where skeletons emerging from purgatory are portrayed as being reassembled as incorrupt human bodies in preparation for resurrection (Figs.154-55).[402] The manner in which this correlation of bodily wholeness with salvation, as well as the association between partition and decay with punishment for sin, resonates in these

[401] For a history of Santa Maria Assunta di Torcello and the history of its restorations, see A. Niero, 'The Basilica of Torcello and Santa Fosca', *ARDO*, 1978, p. 5.
[402] Jean or Jehan Bellegambe (1470-1535) was a Flemish painter specializing in religious paintings, triptychs and polyptychs. The standard monograph on Bellegambe remains, A. Preux, "Résurrection d'un grand artiste Jehan Bellegambe de Douai: peintre du retable d'Anchinin", *Extrait des Souvenirs de la Flandre Wallone, livraison de juin 1862*, éd. De V. Wartelle, 1862. On Signorelli's frescoes at Orvieto Cathedral, see S. N. James, 'Penance and Redemption: The Role of the Roman Liturgy in Luca Signorelli's Frescoes at Orvieto', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 22, No. 44, 2001, pp. 119-47.

scenes could suggest that a link existed in Renaissance perceptions between the fate of the dissected criminal and these wandering and restless *écorchés*. These criminals who have been convicted on earth could be understood as symbolically exhibiting their sins when they display their materially incomplete bodies. After consideration of the aforementioned visual and theological sources concerning the prominence of body and soul in Renaissance salvation history, I would argue that there was a critical link perceived between these images of flayed or dissected bodies, suspended in their transient state between life and death, and broader ideological stakes involved with ideas about redemptive suffering and body-soul duality. As their mortal bodies have been destroyed and they have been denied Christian burial by the contemporary criminal justice system, the materiality of the body and the immateriality of the soul are both compromised in these *écorchés* because they suggest that without its body the soul cannot either exist or seek its end. This evocation of the flayed body as dead yet still living could have held particular Christian significance at this time with these *écorchés* being in accordance with the way Christ's body adopted a similar dual nature following his earthly death.

The transcendental state of these *écorchés* which are dead yet alive share certain important structural elements with the bodily transience of Christ's resurrection, reappearance and self-revelation to the apostles.[403] Sawday identifies the *écorché*'s tradition of self-demonstrating representation and its depiction as being both dead and alive with Christ's exposure of his wounds during His appearance to Thomas 'the doubting enquirer, who, in order to establish the truth of the Resurrection, scrutinises the opened body with all the intensity of an anatomist… both Christ and the cadaver

[403] On the unity of body and soul, see C. Walker Bynum, 'Bodily Miracles and the Resurrection of the Body in the High Middle Ages', in T. Kselman, *Belief in History: Approaches to European and American Religion*, Notre Dame, 1991, pp. 68-106.

show themselves, allow themselves to be displayed, in order to satisfy the sceptical curiosity of the onlooker. The dead can speak to the living, and proclaim the truth (whether that is religious or scientific) which is present in their own bodies'.[404] One painting that appears to encapsulate this association between the science of anatomical discovery and Christ's Passion is Andrea Mantegna's *Dead Christ* (c.1470) which is a very naturalistic work that presents a dramatically foreshortened Christ as if He is an actual cadaver awaiting autopsy (Fig.156).[405] The manner in which Christ's body is put on display almost as if a specimen of anatomical study in Mantegna's *Dead Christ* exemplifies how scientific discovery, artistic ingenuity, spiritual religion and penitential death were often blended together in the visual domain of Renaissance Italy. As Edgerton states:

> Western Christians had always believed that God had created the universe in pure geometrical forms, and that these forms symbolised his admonishment to mankind to live in moral order. Now, with their new perspective and optically accurate foreshortening, artists were more than ever able to depict the physical world as it actually appears to the eyes and at the same time to reveal to the viewer the divine mathematical laws by which the Creator has constructed all. *Dead Christ* thus teaches that God had made man according to divine proportions of his own image, and the viewer must therefore see in the picture the sheer beauty of his creation, still incorporated in the pitiful body of Jesus, who died so that these very laws are proclaimed to man again.[406]

[404] Sawday, 1995, pp. 121-2.
[405] For a useful account of Mantegna's life, achievements, and artistic styles, see J. Manca, *Andrea Mantegna and the Italian Renaissance*, London, 2006. On Mantegna's illusionistic technique of exaggerated foreshortening, see C. Eisler, 'Mantegna's Meditation on the Sacrifice of Christ: His Synoptic Saviour', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 27, No. 53, 2006, pp. 9-22.
[406] Edgerton, 1985, p. 225.

Marsyas, Martyrdom and Memorialising Michelangelo

These religious interpretive modes gain greater significance when we consider Michelangelo's known involvement in dissection, together with his decision to render his self-portrait on the *écorché* figure of Saint Bartholomew in the Sistine chapel painting of *The Last Judgement* (1536-41) (Figs.157-58). The Vatican's Sistine Chapel is named after Pope Sixtus IV, who demolished and replaced the existing Great Chapel in 1477.[407] The Sistine Chapel was used thereafter by the Pope and some elected members of the papal household, which comprised of about two hundred clerics, officials and distinguished laity, for daily worship. The first mass in the Sistine Chapel was celebrated on 9 August 1483, the Feast of the Assumption, at which ceremony the chapel was consecrated and dedicated to the Virgin Mary but there were also fifty occasions during the year when it was prescribed by the papal calendar that masses should be held where the Pope himself was the celebrant.[408] The lower zones of the walls were decorated by the most celebrated painters in Umbria and Tuscany including Pietro Perugino, Sandro Botticelli and Dominico Ghirlandaio, who frescoed the walls with stories of the lives of Christ and Moses offset by papal portraits and trompe l'oeil drapery. After a large fault appeared in the ceiling, Sixtus' successor Julius II commissioned a reluctant Michelangelo to decorate the chapel's barrel vaulted ceiling.[409] The frescoed ceiling was commenced in 1508 and unveiled in 1512. Michelangelo's new ceiling consisted of a series of paintings showing *God's Creation of the World*, *God's Relationship with Mankind*, and *Mankind's fall from God's Grace*. On the large pendants that support the vault Michelangelo also painted twelve Biblical and

[407] C. Hibbert, *Rome, the Biography of a City*, New York, 1987.
[408] J. Monfasani, 'A Description of the Sistine Chapel under Pope Sixtus IV', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 4, No. 7, 1983, pp. 9-18. Also C. Pietrangeli, (ed.), *The Sistine Chapel*, New York, 1986.
[409] For the history of the chapel and the damage to the vaulted ceiling in 1504, see J. Sherman, 'The Chapel of Sixtus IV', in *The Sistine Chapel: The Art, History and Restoration*, New York, 1986, pp. 22-91.

Classical men and women who prophesied that God would send Christ for the salvation of mankind. Michelangelo was resident in his native Florence and working on the Medici Chapel in San Lorenzo when he was summoned to return to Rome by Clement VII in the fall of 1533 to sign the contract for *The Last Judgement* on the Sistine Chapel's entire altar wall. After the sudden death of Clement, the new Pope, Paul III, charged Michelangelo with the execution of a more dramatic and monumental fresco. This redemptive scheme of the second coming of Christ and the Apocalypse was finally constructed on a grand scale of 56 feet high and 44 feet wide between 1535–1541, after the Sack of Rome in 1527 and just before the first meeting of the Council of Trent in 1545.[410]

As an important eschatological theme, the Last Judgement is central to Christian doctrine. The key elements that are to take place at the end of time can be found in Matthew 24 and 25 and consist of the Second Coming of Christ (Matt.24:30-31; 25:31), the separation of the sheep from the goats (Matt.25:32-33), and the promise of recompense (Matt.25:34-46). These Apocalyptic events are also described in the Book of Revelation (19:2, 11, 15; 20:12; 21:6-8). It is from these combined texts that the most important iconographic elements for the visual rendering of the Last Judgement derive.[411] The earliest surviving examples of the Last Judgement that generally follow the text of Matthew date from the sixth century, but the fundamental paradigm which begun to include the Apocalyptic beasts and Celestial Jerusalem from the Book of Revelation emerged in the ninth century (Fig.159).[412] An iconographic formula was

[410] C. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, Indianapolis, 1998.
[411] For an account of Last Judgement scenes in art see Jérôme Baschet's book, *Les justices de l'au-de lâ. Les representations de France et en Italie (XII-XVsiècle)*, Rome, 1993. For the iconographical development of Last Judgement scenes in the medieval period, see J. J. Elliot, '*The Last Judgement Scene in Central Italian Painting, c.1266-1343*', PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2000.
[412] The development of the iconography of *Last Judgement* scenes is traced in Baschet, 1993, pp. 190-232.

established by the mid-eleventh century which usually depicted Christ, as Judge, flanked by apostles and enthroned within a *mandorla* to symbolise his glory. The souls of the dead emerge from the earth, the sea or their coffins to be separated into ranks of the blessed and the damned. From the thirteenth century onwards, Last Judgement scenes such as Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Last Judgement* mosaics on the ceiling of Florence baptistery and Lorenzo Maitani's, *The Last Judgement* for Orvieto Duomo gained popularity (Figs.160-61).[413] These creations often depicted a judging Christ surrounded by trumpeting angels who announce the resurrection of the dead and sometimes accompanied by St Peter or the Virgin who welcome the processions of the blessed to Paradise (Fig.162). Meanwhile the bottom right hand corner generally depicts demons leading the wicked to a hell mouth, cauldron, or dark cavern where they are subjected to various punishments which often reflect their sins (Fig. 163).[414]

Michelangelo's version corresponds to this later tradition in the way his *Last Judgement* is also a depiction of the Second Coming of Christ with the final and eternal judgement by God of all humanity and in how he portrays the souls of humanity rising and descending to their fates as judged by Christ who is accompanied by his saintly entourage (Fig.164). However, the artist presents a monumental and menacing Christ rather than the benevolent redeemer that was the traditional concept of earlier scenes. Michelangelo's commanding figure of the pivotal judging Christ is posed half seated and half standing as He twists in a dynamic *contrapposto* pose with an impassive face and His right arm raised (Fig.165). Christ dominates over his mother Mary and the surrounding Elect who consist of an animated chain of prominent saints including

[413] For more on the *Last Judgement* mosaics in Florence's baptistery, see P. Nassar, 'The Iconography of Hell: From the Baptistery Mosaic to the Michelangelo Fresco', *Dante Studies*, No. 111, 1993, pp. 53-105. On the history and design of Maitani's façade, see J. White, 'The Reliefs on the Façade of the Duomo at Orvieto', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July, 1959, pp. 254-302.
[414] Elliott, 2000, pp. 6-10.

Catherine of Alexandria, Peter, Lawrence, Bartholomew, Paul, Peter Simon, Sebastian, John the Baptist, and others. Michelangelo's Christ is depicted in a way that forcefully reiterates the message that it was only through His resurrection that it has been made possible for the dead to achieve their own resurrection, as stated by Paul: 'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (1Cor.15:23). However, the most innovative and controversial aspects of Michelangelo's interpretation of Last Judgement eschatology is his use of nude male bodies which he often rendered in awkward contorted poses with exposed genitalia to show mankind equalized in their nudity and stripped bare of rank or status.

Those who had access to the *Last Judgement* were largely the curia, connoisseurs, literati and visiting dignitaries and Michelangelo's ground breaking approach ignited polemic responses.[415] Some criticised this perceived lack of decorum and inappropriateness, as the Mantuan envoy to the papal court, Nino Sernini, records in a letter to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga only nineteen days after its unveiling:

> Even though the work is of such beauty your Illustrious Excellency can imagine, there is nonetheless no lack of those who condemn it. The reverend Theatines are the first who say the nudes are displaying themselves in such a place that is not right, although even in this Michelangelo has shown very great consideration since in scarcely ten figures of so great a number can one see immodesty. Others say that he has made Christ beardless and too young, and that Christ does not possess the majesty that should become him, and so, in a word, there is no lack of talk… But, with all this, I will do my best to have at least one sketch so that your Illustrious Excellency will be able to see the composition that Michelangelo has made, which I do not believe will be enough to satisfy you… since it is known that

[415] For an account of the audience for the *Last Judgement*, see B. Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgement: The Renaissance Response*, Berkeley, 1998.

> Michelangelo has put all of his effort into making imaginative figures in diverse attitudes.[416]

The fresco's harshest criticism came from Aretino, who expressed his disapproval in a letter to Alessandro Corvino, in the *Fourth Book of Letters*, which was published in 1550:

> However, as a baptized man, I am ashamed of the license, so unallowable to the spirit that you have taken in expressing the ideas toward which every aspect of our absolutely true faith aspires. For how can that Michelangelo of such stupendous fame, that Michelangelo of outstanding prudence, that Michelangelo of admirable habits, have wanted to show to the people no less religious impiety than artistic perfection? Is it possible for you, who through being divine do not condescend to the company of men, to have made this in the foremost temple of God? . . . You, in a subject of such a high history, show the saints and angels, the former without any of the decency proper to this world, and the latter deprived of celestial ornament. Here even the pagans in their sculpture—I'm not speaking of the clothed Diana, but the nude Venus—make her cover with her hand those parts that may not be revealed. And yet he who is a Christian, by valuing art more than faith, makes such a genuine spectacle out of both the lack of decorum in the martyrs and virgins, and the gesture of the man grabbed by his genitals, that even in a brothel the eyes would shut so as not to see it. . . . It would be less of a sin for you not to believe than by believing in this manner to weaken the faith of others.[417]

On the other hand, others such as Niccolo Martinelli wrote to Michelangelo extolling the artist's virtuosity and praising the honour the fresco brought to his native Florence:

> Did not God miraculously create in your imagination the pure idea of the tremendous Last Judgement that you recently unveiled, which astonishes whoever

[416] Original transcription from L. Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste,* Vol. V, pp. 842-3, in Hall, 2005, pp. 120-1.
[417] This letter was published in Aretino's *Third Book of Letters*. The Italian text and a translation can be found in Chastel, 1984, p. 200, cited in Barnes, 1998, p. 81.

> sees it, and which so infatuates whoever even hears of it that a great desire comes upon him and will not leave him until he does see it. And, who upon seeing it finds that its fame is great and immortal, but the work itself is greater still, indeed divine? Wherefore one might rightly speak of a Michelangelo, God's messenger in heaven, and one on earth, only son and sole imitator of nature. But, so as not to venture upon such perilous high seas, I will come to an end, begging you to accept the rhymes that my affection for your goodness has inspired me to create, not as things worthy of you, but as things from our homeland.[418]

The extent to which Michelangelo had the interpretive community in mind when he designed and executed the fresco is unrecorded, as is the artist's personal response to his critics. Most contemporary viewers may have been male, well educated, and members of the clergy who held orthodox views on matters like the value of good works, the intercessory power of the Virgin and saints, and the permanence of hell. Nevertheless, that Michelangelo had this particular type of viewer in mind as he designed the *Last Judgement* is, to my mind, too simple an assumption. The artist had a reputation for resisting the felicitations of even his papal patrons and I would suggest that he saw the act of painting more as a conscious identification or communication with God. Michelangelo's stylistic choices, figural variety, dramatic unity, and iconographic complexity suggest he was less concerned with impressing his audience through elaborate ornamentation or decoration than mastering perfection in portraying mankind in the image of God. In his description of the *Last Judgement*, Vasari offers a response to its criticisms by extolling Michelangelo's virtuosity:

> It is enough for us to understand that this extraordinary man chose always to refuse to paint anything save the human body in its most beautifully proportioned and perfect forms and in the greatest

[418] P. Barocchi and R. Ristori, (eds.), *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, Vol. IV, Florence, 1979, cited in M. Hall, *Michelangelo's Last Judgement*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 123.

> variety of attitudes, and thereby to express the wide range of the soul's emotions and joys. He was content to prove himself in the field in which he was superior to all his fellow craftsmen, showing the way of the grand manner and of the nude, and displaying his great understanding of the difficulties of design. Thus he has demonstrated how painting can achieve facility in its chief province: namely, the reproduction of the human form. And concentrating on this subject he left to one side the charm of colouring and the caprices and novel fantasies of certain minute and delicate refinements that many other artists, and not without reason, have not entirely neglected. Some artists, who are not so well based in *disegno*, have tried to take another path by using various tints and shades of colours, bizarre forms, and new inventions. And in this way they have tried to take a place among the greatest masters. But Michelangelo, standing always firmly rooted in his profound understanding of the art, has shown to those who can understand how they achieve perfection.[419]

Many of the fresco's sophisticated details were situated where they would have evaded close scrutiny in a candle-lit chapel so it is unlikely that all the minutiae were constructed with a particular audience in mind. However, Michelangelo was a pious man who strove to surpass nature through the achievement of perfection, and as Vasari states, the *Last Judgement* is 'grand painting inspired by God and enabling mankind to see the fateful results when an artist of sublime intellect infused with divine grace and knowledge appears on the earth'.[420]

When Michelangelo decided to represent Saint Bartholomew as a tormented martyr holding his own flayed skin in the *Last Judgement* fresco, the Apollo and Marsyas myth was well known, and most educated Renaissance viewers would have

[419] G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, Baltimore, 1986, p. 381.
[420] Vasari, 1986, pp. 378-9.

been familiar with the allusion. Whether Michelangelo was acquainted with the many artistic allusions to the Ovidian myth that were in circulation is unrecorded but he must have been familiar with Raphael's *Apollo and Marsyas* rendition on the ceiling of the nearby Stanza della Segnatura in the papal apartments (Figs.166-67).[421] Michelangelo's perception of flayed skin is particularly visible in his representation of St Bartholomew where the saint is assigned a central position close below the judging Christ. Bartholomew is holding in one hand the knife with which he was flayed and in the other his own eviscerated skin (Fig.168).[422] However, closer inspection of the saint's bald pate and grey beard reveals that the flayed skin that Bartholomew holds in his hand does not bear his own features but that of a clean shaven man with tousled dark hair. When we examine Jacopino del Conte's *Portrait of Michelangelo* (1540), it becomes apparent that the physiognomy on the skin is a self-portrait of Michelangelo himself (Figs.169-70). It is surprising to note that there is no recorded contemporaneous observation or attribution on this matter of Michelangelo's self-portrait in the *Last Judgement* fresco and that the first to offer literary comment on this resemblance was the physician Francesco La Cava in 1925.[423] Although the clergyman Don Miniato Pitti makes no reference to the resemblance of the face to that of Michelangelo, he does note the discrepancy between the features of the saint and his skin in his letter to Vasari protesting that 'there are a thousand heresies here, and above all in the beardless skin of Bartholomew, while the figure that is not flayed has a long beard, which shows the skin is not his'.[424] Leo Steinberg, who has forwarded the most advanced interpretation of the

[421] This commission was undertaken in 1509 and completed by 1511. On the ceiling see, I. D. Rowland, 'The Vatican Stanze', in *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, ed. Marcia B. Hall, Cambridge, 2005, p. 111.
[422] This iconography suggests that the Bartholomew in the *Last Judgement* would have been the inspiration for the aforementioned Becerra *écorché* illustration of 1560.
[423] F. La Cava, *Il Volto di Michelangelo scoperto nel Giudizio Finale*, Bologna, 1925.
[424] Letter to Vasari dated May 1, 1545. This letter, one of several to Vasari from Miniato Pitti, was first published in K. Frey, *II Carteggio di Giorgio Vasari*, Munich, 1923, pp. 148-49. Also see A. Chastel, *A Chronicle of Italian Renaissance Painting*, trans. L. and P. Murray, New York, 1984, pp. 190, 279, cited in Hall, 2005, p. 125.

self-portrait on the skin with what he identifies as the artist's 'Line of Fate' in the Last Judgement, asks:

> Why this delayed recognition? What inhibited the perception, which now seems so overwhelmingly obvious, that the Apostle martyred by excoriation appeared in the fresco as a bald white-bearded figure, holding the skin of another, whose short hair and beard were, like Michelangelo's, black and curly? Was the visual evidence eclipsed by Vasari's silence? Did Vasari as our primary source set the professional norm for what was to be overlooked? And is this why the discovery of the self-portrait had to await an outsider, Francesco La Cava, a physician unconcerned about art-historical rules? [425]

For Steinberg, the answer lies not in Michelangelo's contemporaries' failure to recognise the artist's self-portrait but rather in a conspired cover-up aimed at deflecting attention away from what might have been perceived as the artist's outlandish and presumptuous importation of his own heretical and inner-directed fears for salvation.[426] Once the Council of Trent issued its decree in 1545 that 'all lasciviousness should be avoided in religious art', considerable controversy surfaced around the *Last Judgement* with Michelangelo standing accused of violating the boundaries of decorum with his nudes and even of compromising his own religious piety in the name of high art.[427] According to Vasari, the Pope's own master of ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena, even protested that 'it was mostly disgraceful that in so sacred a place there should have been depicted all those nude figures, exposing themselves so shamefully, and that it was no

[425] See the detailed discussion in L. Steinberg, 'The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Spring,1980, pp. 411-56. Also, L. Steinberg, 'A Corner of the *Last Judgement* ', *Daedalus*, spring 1980, pp. 207-73.
[426] Steinberg, 1980, pp. 122-3.
[427] For criticism of the fresco, see E. Childs, (ed.), 'Aretino, the Public and the Censorship of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*', in *Suspended License- Censorship and the Visual Arts*, Seattle, 1997, pp. 59-84.

work for a papal chapel but rather for the public baths and taverns'.[428] Therefore, one plausible motive could be that this conspiracy of silence was influenced by prudence in order to avoid further destructive criticism which would have put the fresco in added jeopardy at a time when the contemporaneous religious climate was rapidly moving toward the moral austerity of the Counter-Reformation.

The reasoning which may have caused Michelangelo's contemporaries to refrain from comment on this resemblance to the artist himself may be inconclusive but it is clear that Michelangelo's preoccupation with skin was also formulated in his written work. The artist's biographer and friend, Ascanio Condivi (1524-75), reports in his *Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1553) that Michelangelo could go for weeks without changing his boots and that eventually he would peel off his skin like a snake.[429] In his poems, Michelangelo's fixation with his own skin is very obvious. In Sonnet 161, he links casting off his 'old habits' with skin:

> From what sharp, biting file does your tired skin
> keep growing thin and failing O ailing soul? When
> will time release you from it, so you'll return to
> heaven, where you were pure and joyful before, your
> dangerous and mortal veil cast off? For even if I
> change my hide in my final brief years, I cannot
> change my old established habits, which as more
> days pass, weigh down and compel me more. [430]

In the poem known as *The Silkworm*, composed in the 1530s, Michelangelo reiterates the importance of revealing the true identity that is hidden beneath one's skin:

> With grace to all, to itself only scorn, a wretched
> beast is born in grief and pain, clothes their hands,
> but its own hide unskins, and only in dying may be
> called well born. So too I'd want to have my fate

[428] G. Vasari, trans. George Bull, 1987, p. 379.
[429] Condivi, p. 195.
[430] V. Colonna, *Rime e lettere*, p. 43, no. 161.

adorn. My Lord, while living, with my dead
remains; only in death can my condition turn.[431]

In several of his sonnets and letters to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, Michelangelo expresses a preoccupation with the shedding of his own skin: 'Now that time is changing and sloughing off my hide, death and my soul are still battling, one against another, for my final state.'[432] One meets with precisely these ideas in other poems, in which Michelangelo articulates this same split between the soul and the sacrificed skin that appears to be reflected in the representation of St Bartholomew through his new glorified body and his old skin: 'Merciful to others and merciless only to itself, a lowly creature is born, who with pain and sorrow clothes another's hand and strips off its own skin, and only through death might be called truly born.'[433]

Taking Steinberg's thought-provoking essay as a point of departure, the arguments to follow refine and develop the author's theories on the manner in which Michelangelo appears to transform traditional iconography of St Bartholomew into a very personal parable. I also argue that the fresco perhaps contains an audacious declaration of spiritual uncertainty that articulates the same turbulent state of mind over his personal salvation and his earthly desires which were expressed only a few years earlier in his poetry and drawings for Tommaso de' Cavalieri. Previously, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I suggested that during the period 1532 to 1538, thus when he signed the contract, as well when he designed and began the *Last Judgement* fresco, Michelangelo was contemplating, addressing and articulating both pictorially in a series of drawings and textually in several poems and letters for his friend Tommaso his turbulent state of mind. I also proposed that the cause of this anguish was the artist's

[431] Saslow, 'Sonnet 94', 1991.
[432] Saslow, 'Sonnet 51', 1991.
[433] Saslow, 'Sonnet 21', 1991.

concerns over his own prospects for personal salvation and his earthly lustful desires.[434] From this perspective, Michelangelo's appropriation of the flaying theme, together with his inscription of his self-portrait on Bartholomew's shod skin in the *Last Judgement* could be seen as pictorially attenuating the desires that consumed him in the few years before and during the first stages of the commission for the *Last Judgement*. I suggest that when Michelangelo leaves the empty skin bearing his own image hanging over the precipice of Hell, he is perhaps making a commentary on his own precarious redemptive status and pronouncing his inner guilt over the potential erotic feelings he felt toward Tommaso. Read this way, the artist's graphic documentation of this personal conflict in *The Rape of Ganymede, The Punishment of Tityus* and *The Fall of Phaeton* now culminates in the *Last Judgement* as the embodiment of his awareness of the need to shed this earthly sheath of perceived debasing sexual desires and convictions in order to attain bodily resurrection. This link connecting Michelangelo's self-portrait on the scourged hide of Bartholomew to his own moral conscience becomes more explicit when we consider, as Steinberg observes, that this facial self-portrait is intersected by a traversing diagonal that connects the fresco's upper left and bottom right corners (Fig.171). Michelangelo assigns a considerable degree of self-investing significance to his portrait's concrete location exactly half-way on the continuum to Heaven and Hell as if he is awaiting Christ's sentence of dreaded eternal punishment or the much hoped for appointment of eternal bliss. Michelangelo's mortal body and earthly passions gave him so much torment. By inserting his own physiognomy on the figure of Bartholomew's discarded skin, it is possible that he was hoping to be issued a new

[434] See Hall, 2005, pp. 1-5, who cites evidence that the contract was signed in 1532 but states that Michelangelo did not start painting until May 1536, also that preparatory drawings, now lost, were presented to Pope Clement in summer of 1534 and that Sebastiano del Piombo prepared the wall in April 1535 while Michelangelo was working on the cartoon.

glorified body for the resurrection providing he cast off the earthly sins he felt possessed his soul. Close inspection of many of the elements that Michelangelo includes in the *Last Judgement*, such as trumpeting angels and the way Christ is posed upon a cloud formation, reveals that it is clear his vision of the subject of the Second Coming finds its roots in Matthew 24:30-31:

> And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all of the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the Son of man coming in clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

When considered in this context of Michelangelo's anguish about his personal salvation, it is possible that the depiction of his own identity on the sheath of flayed saintly skin can be read as a self-reflexive act of genuine confessional piety where the artist deliberately asserts his own personal dimension within the public narrative of mercy, damnation and deliverance in the *Last Judgement*. Indeed Steinberg states: 'His vision of the *Last Judgement* arrests an uncertain instant when, among those repossessed of their flesh, one man alone remains unrestored, a dejected sheath lacking body; for whom Saint Bartholomew pleads as his intercessor: "Do not cast him away; let him too resurrect into eternal life." '[435] The same salvation anxieties emerge in Michelangelo's sonnet to Vasari where he expresses an analogous uncertainty of his redemption:

> The voyage of my life at last has reached, across a stormy sea, in a fragile boat, the common port all must pass through, to give an accounting for every evil and pious deed.
>
> So now I recognise how laden with error was the affectionate fantasy that made art an idol and

[435] Steinberg, 1980, p. 434.

> sovereign to me, like all things men want in spite of their best interests. What will become of my thoughts of love, once gay and foolish, now that I'm nearing two deaths?
>
> I'm certain of one and the other looms over me. Neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer to calm my soul, now turned toward that divine love that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.[436]

Michelangelo's self-portrait is positioned centrally within the composition and near to Christ as if pleading for merciful dispensation. But it is also centred exactly half-way on the oblique compositional axis descending from Heaven in the fresco's top left hand section downward to Hell in the bottom right corner (Fig.172). Michelangelo paints his self-portrait on the flayed skin of Bartholomew but then places this image of himself midway on the diagonal axis that runs between the Crown of Thorns, downward through the wound in Christ's side, through the knife brandished by the martyr Bartholomew, through the unidentified sinner about to be dragged down to hell and is then terminated at the midpoint of the sinister figure of Minos, the Prince of Hell (Fig.173). This compositional strategy lends cohesive support to the premise that elements of the *Last Judgement* fresco were radically innovative and held deep personal significance for Michelangelo, thus signifying that the work, in part at least, might be understood as the manifestation of his profound fears of imminent threat of damnation and eternal torture for licentious desire. This argument gains further momentum by the fact that this downward trajectory finishes in what is surely an intense emblem of self-revelation concerned with sinful lust with Minos's penis being intimately engaged with the mouth of a huge serpent.[437] Minos, who appeared to Dante at the entrance to the

[436] Saslow, 1991, pp. 476-7.
[437] Steinberg, 1980, p. 433.

second circle of Hell in his *Inferno,* is even lending a hand to support the serpent with no sign of unease (Fig.174). In Dante's *Inferno,* Virgil states: 'I mean that when the spirit born to evil appears before him, it confesses all; and he, the connoisseur of sin, can tell the depth in Hell appropriate to it as many times as Minos wraps its tail around himself, that marks the sinner's level'.[438] However, Michelangelo depicts the serpent's tail as if it is an extension of Minos' own body and makes an unequivocal reference to sexual sin by representing this judge of the Damned in Hell receiving oral attention from the serpent. Steinberg sees this as an act of fellatio, asking: 'Is it not strange to see this bestial fellation trued with Christ's wound and crown, and again with the artist's self-image, bobbing the line that plummets from peak to base?'[439] However, the way in which the serpent approaches the penis from the side with bared fangs could suggest the possibility that the serpent is actually striking Minos' member as painful punishment for sexual sin. Such an interpretation gains currency when one considers the alluring role of the serpent in the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where it promotes as good what God had forbidden (Genesis 3:1).[440] When read either way, the association between the serpent and punishment for sexual sin seems unequivocal. Therefore I maintain that the answer to these questions very probably lies in the same tensions and anguish about physical desire and its engendered threat of damnation and eternal torture that Michelangelo expressed in his presentation drawings and poems for Tommaso just a few years earlier. I contend that it surely cannot be by coincidence that the deeply pious Michelangelo, who had both pictorially and textually articulated his conflicted emotions about his physical desire for another man, privileges in this strategic position

[438] Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Canto V, trans. C. S. Singleton, Princeton, 1970. Minos is also found in the *Aeneid* (6.432-33), but Homer gives no description of Minos' appearance and says only that he presides over an urn containing votes that will decide the place of souls in the underworld. Of some interest is the fact that Plato speaks of Minos as an under-world judge, a half-divinity, who was upright in his earthly life (*Apologia* 41a).
[439] Steinberg, 1980, p. 433.
[440] See E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, London, 1990.

above the door that would have led into and out of the Sistine chapel, Minos' demonic lustful corporeality as an emblem of corrupt sexual desire. Close examination of the above relevant pictorial and compositional elements of the *Last Judgement* fresco reveals that great emotional, moral and artistic capital has been invested by Michelangelo in this monumental commission. The arguments that have been presented here purport that the motivation behind the painting of his self-portrait on Bartholomew's flayed skin derives in great measure from an inner dialect concerned with his fear of personal retributive damnation - to the extent that the iconographic significance of flaying is placed at the very centre of the visionary narrative that constitutes the redemptive theme of the *Last Judgement*.

The significance of the flayed body to Michelangelo's life and his art becomes all the more intriguing when we examine a drawing by Zanobi di Bernado Lastricati (1508-1590) of the design of the temporary catafalque that was erected on July 14, 1564 for the artist's funeral service in the Medici church of San Lorenzo in Florence (Fig.175).[441] Lastricati's drawing documents that the funerary catafalque illustrated significant episodes in Michelangelo's career. One scene portrayed is the artist being received by his patron and benefactor Lorenzo de' Medici, which occupies the left side of the second tier. Directly opposite on the right hand side there is a sketch of the statue of *David*. Occupying the centre of this tier and flanked by these two momentous events is an arch with two representations of statues of Marsyas. One of these figures depicts the satyr hanging with its arms stretched above the head, whilst the other seems to have collapsed with its arms bound behind the back (Fig.176).

[441] A descriptive text of the service and catafalque is in B. Varchi's *Oranzione funerale di M.Buonarroti in Firenze, e recitat da Lui pubblicamente nell'essequie di Michelagnolo Buonarroti in Firenze, nell Chiesa di San Lorenzo,* Florence, 1564, cited in F. Jacobs '(Dis)assembling: Marsyas, Michelangelo, and the Accademia del Disegno', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Sept. 2002), pp. 426-48.

According to the 1536 entry in the diary kept by the visiting German jurist Johannes Fichard, Lorenzo's sculptural garden was entered through an arched portal flanked by classical sculptures of Marsyas.[442] Fichard describes the statues depicting Marsyas as having two clearly distinctive poses; one of the statues represented the satyr seated and the other was tied to a tree and flayed.[443] Vasari also recorded the appearance of the portal with its two Marsyas sculptures in his *Life of Andrea Verrocchio*:

> Cosimo de'Medici, having received many antiques from Rome, had caused to be set up inside the gate of his garden, or rather, the courtyard which opens onto the Via de'Ginori, a very beautiful Marsyas of white marble, bound to a tree trunk, ready to be flayed; and Lorenzo his grandson, into whose hands had come the torso with the head of another Marsyas, made of red stone and very ancient, and much more beautiful than the first, wanted to see it beside the first Marsyas, but could not because it was so imperfect. Therefore he gave it to Andrea to be restored and completed and Andrea made the missing legs, the flanks, and the arms of the figure out of pieces of red marble, so well that Lorenzo was highly satisfied, and had it placed opposite to the other Marsyas on the other side of the door. The ancient torso, made to represent a flayed Marsyas, was wrought with such care and Judgement that certain delicate white veins, which were in red stone, were carved by the artist exactly in the right places so as to appear to be little nerves, as seen in real bodies when they have been flayed.[444]

The fact that these two Marsyas sculptures were prized so highly by Lorenzo, and were given such prominence on the catafalque celebrating Michelangelo's greatest achievements, suggests that these ancient statues appear to have assumed a defining role

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[442] A. Schmarsow, "Excerpt aus John Fichard's Italia von 1536," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 14, 1891, pp. 377-80, cited in Jacobs, 2012, p. 428.

[443] These statues are now lost and should not be identified with the so called '*red Marsyas*' or the '*Marsyas Orsini*' in the Uffizi, see F. Caglioti, 'Due restauratori per la anchita dei primi Medici: Mino da Fiesole, Andrea Verrocchio e il 'Marsia rosso' degli Uffizi, *Prospettiva*, 72, October 1993, pp. 17-42, cited in E. Marchand and A. Wright, *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage 1434-1530*, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 85-7. Also see Bober and Rubenstein, 1986, pp. 75.

[444] Vasari-Milanese, Vol. 3, pp. 366-7.

in the values attributed to *disegno* - the concept linking the theory and practice of creating art, and the departed Michelangelo's ability to render the perfect and paradigmatic human form. The perception of these statues as emblems of Medicean cultural magnificence is endorsed by the fact that the Laurentian sculptural garden was considered to be the *scuola* that would later form Florence's art academy, the *Accademia et Compagnia dell'Arte del Disegno*. Michelangelo's artistic pre-eminence meant that he was elected as one of the *Accademia del Disegno*'s two figurehead *capi* which was instituted in January 1563 - only one year before his death. As Beat Wyss asserts:

> The great Renaissance painters sensed in Marsyas an affinity to their own existence as artists… Marsyas suffers torture as the chosen one, and Apollo absorbs himself in the sacrificial process as an instrument of necessity. He wields the knife much as the engraver guides his burin over the plate… Marsyas is a martyr for art. Art is meant to radiate through his agonising death, as does the assurance of Christian salvation through Christ's sacrifice. Marsyas has the pious, humble relentlessness of the Christian saint. [445]

The influence of these Marsyas statues and indeed Michelangelo's supremacy in *disegno* can be found in both his *Dying Slave* and the *Rebellious Slave* (1513) which form part of a series of unfinished sculptures for the modified tomb of Pope Julius II (Figs.177-78).[446] Here, the artist appears to apply his studies of the antique works in Lorenzo's sculptural garden in order to execute the idealised male body in struggle. The possibility that these Marsyas statues, together with their mythological source, informed the structure and substance of Michelangelo's work becomes considerably more

[445] B. Wyss, 'The Last Judgement as Artistic Process', *RES* 28, 1995, p. 65.
[446] E. Panofsky, 'The First Two Projects of Michelangelo's Tomb of Julius II', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 19, No. 4, December 1937, pp. 561-79.

convincing when one considers the manner in which these slaves are imbued with a sense of latent power as they writhe and strain to escape the bonds of physical reality.

The theme of the flayed body and the shedding of skin is an informing motif in Michelangelo's letters, poetry, paintings and his funerary monument. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Marsyas myth was invested with much meaning for Michelangelo. The appropriateness of the Marsyas figures in Michelangelo's memorialising catafalque can be linked to the fact that the artist exemplified the advancement of anatomical knowledge through dissection. There is also the allusion that his study of the male human form from a young age was indebted to an intimate familiarity with the Marsyas statuary in the Medici garden *scuola*. This prominence at Michelangelo's memorial implies that the iconography of Marsyas, and the theme of flaying more generally, was a subject that could be identified with Michelangelo by his admirers and contemporaries. The iconography of flaying that we see in the *Last Judgement*'s Saint Bartholomew is thus linked typologically with these figures of Marsyas which are deployed in commemoration of Michelangelo's mastery of the excellence and academic values of *la terza maniera* on his funerary catafalque.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered selected case studies of the Renaissance fascination with the myth of Apollo and Marsyas and the representation of the flayed body in its visual culture. My analysis has attempted to illuminate a range of concerns surrounding many of the layered allusions which impute various meanings on the theme of flaying; specifically those of identity, scientific discovery, social justice and personal redemption. I have opined that the widespread currency of the flaying theme provides visual evidence of the manner in which its use in Renaissance art could be seen as a

dynamic locus for defining and codifying personal, political and social roles that constitute the cultural, social and psychosexual expressions of masculine identity. When considered within these frameworks, it is possible to think more concretely about how these grisly, but yet beautiful works, might have been conceived, produced and interpreted. New reading of this preoccupation with the depiction of flaying is important because only by exploring the possibility that other complex and variable interpretive theories might co-exist alongside the paradigmatic Neo-Platonic model is it possible to gain a clearer understanding of the prominence of this theme at this time.

GENERAL SUMMARY

My approach throughout this thesis has been to analyse and situate the multivalent allegorical layers and individual meanings for each of the above case studies so that they can be read in a variety of ways and sited within the sexual, social and political values of the Renaissance period itself. It has aimed to illustrate how, as powerful contemporary signifiers of the masculine order, each of the works discussed throughout this thesis can help to constitute a central corpus of visual depictions of mythology can provide a particularly rich site for the study of sex, gender performance and identity in relation to the historical and sexual specificity of this time.

Chapter One investigated how depictions of pederasty bear directly on the manner in which Western society and its homoerotically themed art were both products of rapidly changing attitudes about sex, and how a major factor in this change can be attributed to a growing recognition of the variety possible in human sexuality. The primary works under discussion here were Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth*, and Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* which I argued can be read as engendering interpretive frameworks in erotic, social and cultural terms. As pederastic exemplars of the superordinate adult Apollo with his subordinate adolescent male beloveds, I have argued that these works should not be seen solely as an illustration or reflection of a mythological text or a textual tradition. By investigating these works and their iconographical and semiotic elements, along with a close understanding of the sexual, social or cultural taxonomies and determinants that prevailed in that age, this chapter has explored the manner in which Benvenuto Cellini and Giulio Romano used homoerotic mythological narratives in order to embody a complex set of messages that encoded issues of gender performance and masculine behaviour. My aim has also been

to construct a more expanded account of the manner in which these myths with a homoerotic complexion could have been engendered in such a way by Renaissance artists so that they reflected, expressed, embodied and helped shape or challenge the social and sexual attitudes of their own time and place. The ideological force of this claim is invoked through the analysis of these images and their visual association with patriarchal structures of power which were distinctively and influentially grounded within a symbolic framework based on assumed definitions of gender appropriate behaviour. When read as an expression of the existing social and sexual relations, both Cellini's *Apollo and Hyacinth* and Romano's *Apollo and Cyparissus* can be interpreted as embodying the representative value of the gendered masculine body in Renaissance popular culture and the manner in which the social norms of male-male sexuality were both visually activated and characterised.

As individual case studies, each work brings into closer focus how depictions of pedagogic pederasty in different ways and across very different domains of medium can provide a paradigm for understanding the role and visual representation of gender performance in relation to male same-sex erotic relations as well as the social articulation of power. These theories have been supported by consideration of the history of same-sex desire as not only an integral component of the history of sexuality but also as an important concept for the comprehensive understanding of the cultural and social complexities which contributed to the production of pederastic visual representations in the Italian Renaissance. Despite the fact that these works visually represent a mythic narrative of erotic behaviour between males, they conform to the contemporary culturally defined sexual and social roles relating to gender performance and socio-political power that permeated their period. The chapter has contended that, as dynamic loci for defining and codifying political and social roles, both works suggest

that our sights on the past must be realigned, taking into account the cultural norms produced by male-male sexual relations in early modernity.

Chapter Two spoke to the question of Michelangelo's sexual desires and his attraction to Tommaso de' Cavalieri. There has been close visual analysis of *The Rape of Ganymede*, *The Punishment of Tityus* and *The Fall of Phaeton* along with consideration of the intricate nuances and sophisticated pictorial vocabulary used by Michelangelo in this corpus of drawings conceived for Tommaso during the first two years of their long friendship. As Michelangelo's only works intended as gifts that have pagan mythology as their subject matter, these presentation drawings are a privileged medium for a better understanding of Michelangelo's innermost thoughts and feelings because they were exempt from the normal economy of commercial artistic product and intended for their recipient's eyes alone. By demonstrating how these three drawings both engage with and diverge from their mythological sources, I addressed the ways in which Michelangelo could have made this choice of pagan subject matter in order to visually express the sense of elation, guilt, ascent and fall which he associated with this love. However, my goal has not been to resolve the matter of whether the love shared by the couple was in fact carnally consummated but to pay closer attention to the rhetoric of the drawings, and their accompanying letters and poems, themselves. Instead, this chapter considered the manner in which the autobiographical complexion of these drawings, which are so heavily freighted with moral meaning, could be interpreted as the visual expression of the conflict that existed within Michelangelo between duty and desire, imagination and reason, sin and torment.

The multi-layered and interwoven mythological and sexual themes at play within *The Rape of Ganymede*, *The Punishment of Tityus* and *The Fall of Phaeton* have long remained under-theorised. I maintained, however, that if we link the works by a

meaningful narrative that establishes a connection between these drawings it is possible to discover the manner in which their profound philosophical meanings provide larger cultural and personal significance. By approaching these drawings as a visually readable continuum of events, I argued that the interconnection between their possible meanings can be read as the reflection of the complexity Michelangelo invested in their conception. With this in mind, I offered the proposition that the intricate subject matter and suggestiveness of these works calls for their reading as single components of a tripartite suite where every element of each composition is determined by the proceeding one, and determines the next to follow. When read together, as well as tangentially with Michelangelo's poetry and letters, these drawings then reveal a sophisticated web of interconnections that follows a complicated and ever shifting narrative told through the evolving relationship of one image to another.

A powerful index to the unfolding of Michelangelo's conceptual and creative processes and our understanding of his conflict pertaining to sexual desire is the connection that appears to exist between the pictorial vocabulary of his presentation drawings and the philosophical, theological and social concerns of the society to which he belonged. Through exploration of the ways in which sexual desire was an important social and political as well as ethical issue at this time, the chapter brought into closer focus the centrality of Christian morality to Renaissance sensibilities, along with a grasp of the social formation with which sexual behaviour and its theological expurgation was imbricated.

Chapter Three discussed the broader implications of the manner in which Renaissance artistic tradition presents a broad range of treatments of the topos of flaying. It considered the popularity of this phenomenon in Renaissance art in light of

the fact that the occurrence of flaying, with the exception of a single recorded incident of flaying that occurred in 1571, was not embedded in contingent historical evidence. Therefore, the arguments presented in this chapter have aimed to encourage a re-evaluation of depictions of the flayed male body as the articulation of the imaginative and ideological structures of the society that produced them. Particular emphasis was given to the pervasiveness of works of art that depict the Ovidian *Apollo and Marsyas* mythological narrative, which tells the story of Apollo's revengeful flaying of his challenger Marsyas. The objectives here were to recuperate more nuanced interpretive possibilities than the limited paradigmatic Neoplatonic philosophical commentary that has been expressed to date in the arena of traditional art historical discourse. Instead, the core issues under consideration have focused on the manner in which Renaissance artists could have incorporated this particular myth from pagan antiquity into their particular epistemological understanding of masculine identity, scientific discovery, social justice and personal redemption. This chapter brought together a range of perspectives that explore the ways in which this visual motif is especially well suited to illustrate the relationship between the violation of one's skin and the formation and maintenance of concepts relating to personal, cultural and institutional fears for losing identity.

The overarching aims throughout this thesis have sought to more accurately reflect the true breadth of male gender performance, sexuality and masculine identity in the Renaissance, and in particular, to illustrate how the psychological meanings, patterns and identities assigned to those acts found expression in its visual domain through their shared theme of mythological sources. To date, these issues have not been covered adequately by dominant theoretical paradigms and the interpretive approaches of traditional art historical discourse have often been both limited and limiting in its

timidity toward matters concerning the representation of sexual proclivity between males. My research has set out to offer new material on these previously overlooked aspects using a variety of approaches grounded in a visual and epistemological impetus which takes art objects as its focus. By exploring and defining some of the major historically specific and culturally contingent paradigms and structures of the Renaissance era, I have aimed to bring into closer scrutiny a range of perceptual constructs, idioms and practices that could have been brought to the conception, execution and reception of these works.

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